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READER

Bound to the Point

Tales of the Southside Pod swimmers **By S. Nicole Lane 15**

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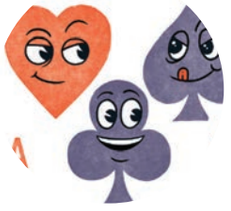

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STAFF NOTE

THE *READER* HAS has announced a new leadership structure as it navigates the transition to a full nonprofit. Tracy Baim, publisher for the past two years, will now be co-publisher alongside Karen Hawkins, who has been co-editor in chief with Sujay Kumar since 2019.

The Reader Institute for Community Journalism (RICJ), the new organization that will soon take over the *Reader*, has received its nonprofit designation from the IRS. RICJ has begun operations and is soliciting individual donations and foundation grants. The *Reader*'s former L3C corporation will operate in partnership with RICJ as the business winds down over the next few months, and the nonprofit takes over by spring.

"I am so excited to be joined by Karen as co-publisher," said Baim. "We worked together 20 years ago at *Windy City Times*, and have worked to pivot the *Reader* these past two years. Karen's leadership and vision will provide a critical role as we seek to navigate the next few years in community media. I am so happy that she has accepted this challenge."

"After two years at the *Reader*, I believe more now than ever that nonprofit, community-focused local journalism is the future of the industry," Hawkins said. "I couldn't be more proud to be part of this talented and dedicated team of world-class journalists. I'm also thrilled to have proven the strength of the co-leadership model this last year with Sujay Kumar as co-editor in chief, and can't wait to see what the future holds with Tracy and I in co-publisher roles."

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Socially distanced outdoor dining in Fulton Market JOHN GREENFIELD

QUARANTINE COPING

This winter doesn't have to suck

Fire pits, cold-weather sports, and other ideas to lift your spirits

By John Greenfield

Look, I get it. Aside from the usual Seasonal Affective Disorder challenges, there are plenty of other reasons for Chicagoans to be bummed about the coming of winter in the time of the coronavirus.

As the temperatures drop and residents gather indoors again, COVID-19 cases are spiking once more. On October 27, citing rising test positivity numbers, Governor J.B. Pritzker announced a renewed ban on indoor service at all Chicago bars and restaurants, and by the time you read this, an even stricter lockdown may be in place.

Infectious disease experts say hanging out in indoor public spaces for nonessential purposes is generally a bad idea during this airborne respiratory pandemic. But the colder, wetter weather is making spending time outside less attractive. It's easy to get discouraged by the situation.

But let's get real: Those of us who are enjoying good physical and mental health and are relatively young; who have the privilege of working from home; and/or aren't facing immediate financial difficulties, should stop whining. The Chicagoans dealing with the greatest challenges this winter will be the elderly and people with underlying conditions whose freedom of movement will be limited; residents facing housing and food insecurity; and the essential workers holding society together.

We should also spare a thought for struggling Chicago hospitality employees and business owners. In a more civilized country like New Zealand, they'd be paid a fair stipend to close their establishments during the crisis.

But enough gloom and doom. I'm here to give you a pep talk.

While we all have a responsibility to behave in ways that don't put ourselves and others at risk, that doesn't mean you have to be miserable this winter. You might even have more fun than usual if you really embrace the season.

After living through the spring quarantine, you've probably got a whole repertoire of indoor activities. But to keep your spirits up when days are short and skies are gray, remember that fire is your friend. I buy candles that smell pleasantly like whiskey and tobacco and light them on overcast days for instant mood elevation. Warm drinks, cinnamon-laden baked goods, thick knit socks, and all that other *hygge* (Scandinavian-style coziness) jazz will be helpful too.

But the real key to staving off the blues this winter will be to stay active and spend as much time outside as possible, as comfortably as possible. If you don't normally dress for the weather, now's the time to start. Make sure you have some decent boots, long johns, and layers of clothing that won't be a drag if they get wet, made of wool, synthetics, or cotton-poly blends. That doesn't require spending a fortune at REI—much of this stuff can also be found at thrift or Army-Navy surplus stores. Maybe invest in a good breathable raincoat or a stylish woolen jacket. Snow suits are also going to be popular this winter.

As for activities, I ran the following ideas by Dr. Richard Novak, head of the division of infectious diseases at UIC, to make sure they're reasonably corona-kosher.

Novak says spending time around a backyard fire pit or bonfire, preferably with face masks and six-feet distancing, is a "definitely reasonable" way to socialize with nonhousehold members. And, again, open flames are sure to lift your spirits on a chilly night. A patio with heaters or grilling on your back porch are great options too. Invite your friends to Bring Your Own Blanket for extra coziness.

Regarding the safety of dining or drinking in open-air, heated restaurant and bar patios with a few friends, Novak said this is "probably OK" as long as the tables are well separated.

Hala Kahiki, the historic tiki bar in River Grove with ornate tropical decor, is a "winter denial" mainstay for me. So I was pleased to hear from manager Jim Oppedisano that the outdoor seating area, watched over by Easter Island-inspired statues, is currently sheltered by a heated tent with open sides for good airflow.

It's also been fun to see businesses getting creative about using pedestrianized roadways for weatherproof socially distanced service. For example, the Darling on West Randolph has adorable little greenhouses adorned with roses sitting on a grassy lawn that's normally diagonal parking. And a whole car-free block of Fulton Market, home to eateries like the Publican and Duck Duck Goat, is filled with clear huts and geodesic domes, along with a groovy street mural.

Novak cautioned me about these kinds of shelters, "Airflow is important: the more enclosed a space, the greater the risk." So if the idea of dining or drinking in a transparent igloo or yurt appeals to you, it's best to do it with household members only. Moreover, for worker safety, employees should avoid entering these structures while customers are present if possible, or at least everyone should be wearing masks when they do.

For a simpler cold-weather COVID pleasure, try a new outdoor physical activity. Winter biking is an ideal pastime for releasing endorphins and warding off depression. It's also a handy form of socially distanced transportation that's easier and more comfortable than it looks. Just make sure the bike you're riding has fenders and lights. (Divvies are great on both counts.) But don't worry about what kind of tires it has—ever since Mayor Michael Bilandic lost reelection after the 1979 blizzard, the city of Chicago has done a great job of plowing the roads.

I'm also a big fan of urban cross-country

skiing and snowshoeing. Pick up your gear at Viking Ski Shop in Humboldt Park, the city's only dedicated winter sports store, in business for over half a century. When there's sufficient snow, my go-to route is the gravel road that runs along the lakefront from Montrose Avenue to the Waveland Clock Tower, with a breathtaking skyline view, followed by a downhill run at nearby Cricket Hill.

That knoll is also great for sledding. Other good destinations include the Dan Ryan Woods, Palmisano Park, Humboldt Park, and the dedicated sledding hill next to Soldier Field.

There's sure to be a huge demand for ice skating this winter, so hot spots like the Millennium Park rink and the Maggie Daley Park skating ribbon will need strategies to prevent overcrowding. Eight other Chicago Park District rinks are fairly well-distributed around the city. But it would be great if pop-up facilities were installed in ice deserts like Englewood and Garfield Park, including free loaner skates and lessons, so more people could discover this fun, healthy activity. Hedge fund billionaire Ken Griffin, how about taking a break from spending $56.5 million to fight Governor Pritzker's graduated income tax plan and sponsoring a couple of rinks?

Taking an outdoor stroll around the free Lincoln Park Zoo is another great COVID-safe option. Currently reservations are required. And I'll probably head to the Osaka Japanese Garden in Jackson Park this winter to check out Yoko Ono's 2016 installation "Sky Landing." The Skokie Northshore Sculpture Park and the Morton Arboretum, populated by giant wooden troll sculptures (reservations required), also spring to mind as fun winter walking destinations.

As an amateur musician, I've had a blast playing socially distanced porch shows this fall. Novak says this kind of thing is "probably OK" if audience members social distance and wear masks. So I'm looking forward to bundling up and taking in whatever outdoor concerts, theatrical productions, dance performances, and comedy shows talented Chicagoans cook up this winter.

The bottom line is that, despite the COVID threat and a long list of things we can't do for fun this winter, there's no need for Chicagoans to lose hope and hibernate. Limited options can be a recipe for creativity, and you may find good times in unexpected places.

@greenfieldjohn

POETRY CORNER

An Open Letter To The Powers That Be

By Cherlnell Lane

I'm wearing war paint and a warrior's stare.
Snarling, with my fist raised in the air.
I'm armed and ready with paper and pen.
This is a Black woman's revolt, so, let's begin.
Being the perfect Black woman just doesn't exist.
'Bout time we realized this
See. See. That's what I mean,
You're already trying to correct me.
I am learning my choices shouldn't be overturned
There are just some things, I need to unlearn.

The problem I have with society
Or should I say the problem they have with me?
Is recognizing all of the energy flowing within
I'm an Ultimate Creator, Goddess wrapped in skin.
Only Black women could understand.
So, here's the plan,
I write this letter on behalf of you and me,
Speaking to the powers that be

Black women, teens, and girls.
You're not what you are perceived to be, by the world.
You don't need an excuse to be who you are no matter what anyone thinks.
I'm connecting the missing links
So, here are some notes people can take.
Some facts, of which they can partake.
We're not your Mammy,
your Aunt Jemima,
Or your unwilling mistress.
Not your baby mama,
sassy homegirl,
Or your appropriation muse.

We revolt against being perceived as angry when we take a stance!
We've taken care of everyone else, it's time to care of ourselves.
We are holding people accountable, the old ways have departed.
We are tired of being brokenhearted.
By this world, country, and our own community!
Black women, come take up this cause with me!

After this revolution, Black women will be a different kind.
We're working on healing our spirit, body, and mind.
We are stepping into our power and being ourselves, boldly.
This is a revolution of Black women being free,
To be Black women, unapologetically.
Until then we won't see,
That the powers that be are we.

Cherlnell Lane is a roaring fire, under a cool demeanor, with a kind soul, that she shares authentically in hopes of healing the world. As a speaker, advocate, facilitator, and poetic-storyteller Lane birthed Cherlnell Lane, LLC where she helps to relate, advocate, and uplift Black women. Cherlnell is also the creator of Writing Through it Workshops and Healing Through it Summits where she helps women to reveal, deal, and heal from Trauma and negative emotions while recognizing and commemorating Strengths and positive experiences. Cherlnell Lane uses her life experiences; to reach and inspire people with her artistry, curriculum, projects, and words.

Poem curated by Nikki Patin: Featured in *The Guardian*, *Chicago Tribune*, HBO's *Def Poetry Jam* and on international television and radio, writer, producer, designer and survivor Nikki Patin has been advocating, performing and educating for 20 years. She has performed at the National Black Theater in Harlem, Brooklyn Museum, the Goodman Theater, EXPO Chicago and many other spaces throughout the US, New Zealand and Australia. Nikki Patin holds an MFA in Creative Non-Fiction from the University of Southern Maine. Patin is the Community Engagement Director for the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation and the founder and Executive Producer of Surviving the Mic, a survivor-led organization that crafts brave and affirming space for survivors of sexual trauma. Her work can be found at nikkipatin.com.

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POETRY FOUNDATION

John Avila MATTHEW GILSON FOR CHICAGO READER

FOOD FEATURE

Minahasa brings Indonesian food to your door

Another furloughed chef, another regional treasure

By Mike Sula

John Avila's mom and grandma tried to "sneak" some *tikus rica rica* into his bowl when he visited their hometown in the mountains of North Sulawesi, Indonesia, a few years back.

That's a spicy field-rat stir-fry, and the chef, on a travel break from the line at the Duck Inn, wasn't fooled.

"It's a little too freaky for me," says Avila, who recently launched an Indonesian meal delivery service based on his mother Betty's recipes. "The bone structure gives it away."

The food of the Minahasa Peninsula, where Betty's hometown Tomohon is, has a wild streak, known for some dishes built on bushmeat—snakes, fruit bats, the occasional primate—but that isn't part of Avila's menu plan. A few weeks ago he delivered 20 orders of *bubur manado*, the official breakfast of the regional capital city. It's a hearty, lemongrass-perfumed, (in this case) vegan congee loaded with spinach, pumpkin, taro root, and corn. "All things that grow around that island," he says.

Avila, who's 32, has been cooking in Chicago for a dozen years under some familiar chefs. His first job out of culinary school was at Jackie Shen's erstwhile Red Light before moving on to the Sofitel under Greg Biggers, and the Four Seasons when Kevin Hickey was in charge. A few years back he spent a year cooking in a New Zealand hotel before staging his way across Australia, Japan, and the Philippines, "exploring the wilderness and trying to find myself."

Up until last month he was a sous chef putting down some pretty plates at Gibsons Italia, when he left amid a downsizing that would have demoted him. Like so many chefs forced to pivot during the pandemic, he turned to his childhood.

Betty Avila came to Chicago in 1986, and her son grew up eating the food his grandmother taught her to make in Tomohon (and the Filipino food she learned when she met his dad). "I had this project going in my head for the past couple months," he says. "Throughout my whole career I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do, and I was like 'I should really open a restaurant with my mom.'"

Avila quietly launched @minahasachicago on Instagram in early September shortly before leaving Gibsons Italia, offering *ayam tuturuga*, a turmeric-tinged lemongrass chicken dish that Betty made nearly every day. "I'd feed it to my friends, and everybody was like, 'Oh, this is great.' So I was just like, 'Why don't I introduce this to everyone in Chicago?'" He followed up with the well-known beef *rendang* (not from Minahasa but still one of his favorites). Then came *soto ayam*, Betty's special-occasion chicken soup with hard-boiled eggs, bean sprouts, tomatoes, crispy garlic and shallots, celery leaves, lime, and sambal.

I ordered this soup when Avila reprised it a few weeks ago. The broth was luminescent, a vivid, limpid, golden bowl of sunshine fueled with sambal and packed with contrasting textures. Avila usually offers skewers of *sate* and egg rolls in his weekly menu, but this week he was running a special of enormous full-jointed chicken wings slathered in sambal.

I ordered the *bubur manado* another week, ignited with *dabu-dabu*—Minahasa's signature tomato and shrimp paste sambal. I didn't realize the congee, sometimes called *tinutuan*, was vegan until Avila told me later. It was the full-flavored blanket of complementary starches that I needed as election anxiety began to spike.

Each menu comes with one of Betty's sweets, this one bearing *onde-onde*, an entirely different interpretation of the coconut-rolled rice balls with bursting palm sugar cores that I wrote about a few weeks ago. The soto ayam came with a jiggly, coconut-*pandan* layered rice cake with a smooth, fudgy texture, another Betty signature.

As far as Indonesian food goes, it's always been rare in Chicago. Another mother-and-son team, Chris and Priscilla Reed of the Indo-Creole mashup Bumbu Roux, have survived the closing of their home at Politan Row, but with Rickshaw Republic a summer casualty of the pandemic, they and Minahasa are the only games in town. When the dust of the pandemic settles, John and Betty aim to go brick and mortar.

Until then, next week's menu will feature the usual egg rolls, *bakso* (a meatball soup), fried bananas (*pisang goreng*), the fried noodle dish *mie goreng*, and *ayam rica rica*, like a spicy chili and tomato stir-fried field rat—but with chicken.

The bone structure should give it away.

@MikeSula

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Rafael Esparza and Mitchell AbouJamra
ALAN EPSTEIN

RESTAURANT REVIEW

You don't mess with Teta at Evette's

Grandma would approve of this Lincoln Park Lebanese-Mexican mashup.

By Mike Sula

Rafael Esparza was a "weird kid" who hated spaghetti. Specifically he did not like his grandmother's cheesy, chile-spiked pasta casserole, the SpaghettiOs of every Mexican American kid's diet.

He hated the mess of it, "the presentation," but "the thing is, I loved the sauce," he says. "I used to dip my french fries in it while she was making it. She would get pissed and be like, 'You don't do that.' I always kept that in the back of my mind, so when Mitchell was like, 'We need some kind of nacho,' I said 'Boom.'"

Esparza was the chef at the recently shuttered Finom Coffee, and Mitchell is Mitchell AbouJamra, his partner in the new Lincoln Park fast-casual Lebanese-Mexican mashup Evette's.

If that sounds like an unlikely clash of cultures, know that if it wasn't for Lebanese immigrants in Mexico, who pivoted from lamb shawarma to pork, there would be no *tacos al pastor* or *tacos arabes*.

It was discussions about this sort of undersung contribution to Mexican cuisine that inspired the partnership. AbouJamra, a former GM for the DMK Restaurants group (among many more varied hospitality gigs), used to deliver chai to Finom, where Esparza was making magical Hungarian dishes with little more than an induction burner. Deliveries led to discussions about the often overstated contributions of the Spanish to Mexican cuisine over that of the slaves they brought, or the Indigenous people they colonized.

"People seem to think nobody cooked food before the French, Italian, or Spanish," says Esparza. "Like food didn't exist before them."

Evette, or "Teta," was AbouJamra's grandmother, a Spanish- and French-speaking Lebanese immigrant who settled in Flint, Michigan, via Cuba, and it's her recipes that contribute the Mediterranean influence on the menu.

The nachos are AbouJamra and Esparza's most collaborative dish. The poblano-spiked cheese sauce drizzled over pita chips, with pomegranate seeds, jalapeno, radishes, and za'atar. Other dishes stay in their lanes a bit more. A lamb melt is Esparza's nod to the viral *quesabirria* trend, a sourdough grilled cheese loaded with 16-hour braised lamb, whipped feta and butterkase cheese, served with a cup of lamb jus for dipping.

"There's always lamb going," says Esparza. "It's stupid, the amount of lamb we sell." You can get it in a wrap or on your nachos, but its greatest, if stealthiest, effect might be on a meatball sub, slathered with Teta's silky *shakshuka* sauce and shredded mozzarella. When I ate this sub I mistook the meaty orbs for lamb, but they're entirely beef. Esparza holds them in the copious volumes of lamb jus his braises produce, which imparts the unmistakable essence of frolicking Aries.

As it turns out, I managed to eat this sandwich just after it was perfected by AbouJamra's dad, a third-generation butcher who flew in from Tucson to taste through the menu and "fix everything."

The shakshuka sauce was breaking because they weren't mounting it with butter. The tabouleh wasn't juicy enough because they were using cherry tomatoes instead of roma. "He was legit back there with the cooks like, 'My mother made it this way. This is how it should be made,'" says Esparza. "So we had to rewrite a lot of the steps."

Esparza is hands-off when it comes to Teta's recipes. He tried adding a little chili oil to the tabouleh, and AbouJamra warned him, "She will reach her hand down from heaven and choke both of us."

While the tacos arabes are a departure from the Mexican-Lebanese original—chicken dressed with feta, tabouleh, and (forgive him, Teta) a hit of that chili oil on flour tortillas—the al pastor tacos stay closer to form, annatto-rubbed pork and pineapple, except for the slice of white American cheese between El Milagro corn tortillas, a nod to Raymond's Tacos #2 on Blue Island.

The fries are the end result of a tasting of some 40 different varieties. They stay crispy well after carryout, and while I can't imagine what Esparza's grandma would make of it, and I'm a bit afraid of what Teta might do, they're just the thing for dipping in the meatball sub's shakshuka sauce.

@MikeSula

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The candidate whose victory inspired me to do a one-man conga line MICHAEL STOKES

POLITICS

We survived!

Trump's MAGA and other tales of the last week's election

By Ben Joravsky

Despite the horn-honking, conga lines, and firecrackers all over town that greeted Joe Biden's victory, MAGA had a surprisingly decent election showing in Chicago.

Donald Trump actually, believe it or not, increased his take from our city—winning about 16.5 percent of the vote. Up from 12 percent in 2016.

He even upped his take in the Black wards—more on that to come.

I know this because I spent much of the weekend doing what I always do after an election—geekishly poring over results in a desperate search for the larger meaning of it all.

Before I go further, allow me to make one thing perfectly clear—just because Donnie increased his Chicago totals does not mean I'm a Debbie Downer about things.

No, no, I was right there with you, Chicago, dancing in my own one-man conga line when word broke on Saturday that Pennsylvania had put Biden over the Electoral College top. (Yo, Dems, one more time—encourage hipsters to move from California to Texas and you'll never have to worry about that damn Electoral College, or Senate, again.)

In fact, you might say I played a small role in Trump's demise. It was all part of my devilish strategy when I wrote a column—one day before the election—predicting a Biden landslide.

As my editor, Karen Hawkins, explained—I was manifesting an act I wanted to happen. Yes, that's what I was doing. I wasn't predicting. I was manifesting—like a millennial. That's me—Ben, the Manifester!

So, OK, I didn't manifest hard enough to win Florida and Texas, as I predicted. But I manifested well enough to take Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and maybe even Georgia. So, you're welcome, Dems.

Actually, the credit for Wisconsin and Michigan goes to the hundreds of volunteers (I see you, Rose Colacino) who worked their asses off on behalf of Biden.

Just as the credit for Georgia goes to Stacey Abrams and her allies, who undid much of the voter suppression that Republicans had used against her.

Now, on with the election analysis, starting with the vote in Chicago's Black wards . . .

The impact of Black voters

By my estimation, Biden won about 95 percent of the Black vote in Chicago.

Which is about what he got from Black voters in Detroit, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and Atlanta.

In fact, it was Black voters in Milwaukee that put Biden over the top in Wisconsin, just as Black voters in Detroit, Philly, and Atlanta put him over the top in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Georgia (if that lead holds on). And Black voters in Chicago comfortably put Illinois in the Biden category.

The good news for Trump is he increased his take from the Black wards.

In 2016, he picked up just under 2 percent of the votes from the four wards with the highest percentage (almost 100) of Black voters.

This time it looks like Trump will win around 3.1 percent of that vote—with mail-in votes still being counted.

For instance, in 2016 he took 397 votes in the Sixth Ward. So far this year he's won 669.

In the Eighth Ward, he went from 405 to 765.

In the 21st Ward, Trump jumped from 389 to 744.

And in the 34th—oh, you get the idea.

That's the good news for Trump. The bad news for Trump is that we are still only talking about 3 percent of the Black vote.

At this rate, Trump may have to wait until the next century before he wins a majority of the Black vote in Chicago.

Several theories for these gains. He won over a handful of high-profile celebrities like Ice Cube and 50 Cent.

Ice Cube is the world-famous movie producer, actor, rapper, and billionaire who wrote the song "Fuck tha Police."

Curiously, Trump was also endorsed by John Catanzara—the MAGA-loving president of the Fraternal Order of Police—who has threatened to kick out of his union any member who dares to take a knee in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement.

Ice Cube and Catanzara—now, that's some coalition. Maybe they'll cut a duet of "Fuck tha Police" in time for next year's Grammys.

Anyway, winning over rich celebrities like Ice Cube is part of Trump's two-prong strategy for Black voters.

On the one hand, he accentuates his celebrity blessings—it's almost as though we know the names of every Black person for Trump. And on the other he moves heaven and earth to suppress the vote of millions of ordinary Black voters who wouldn't vote for him in a million years. No matter what any celebrity says.

As we can see, the first part worked. But the second part was a miserable failure, as demonstrated by the long lines of Black voters in Milwaukee, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Atlanta (by the way—thank you Stacey Abrams) patiently waiting for their chance to vote against Trump.

Where Trump won in Chicago

As for the rest of the city, Trump picked up his totals, especially on the northwest and southwest sides—or, what passes for MAGA country around here. In the 41st Ward, out by O'Hare, he won over 47 percent of the vote. Up from 43 percent in 2016.

And in the 19th Ward—in and around Beverly—he won about 39 percent. Up from 35. Not bad. But not great.

Trump also received more votes in the wealthy north lakefront wards. For instance, he won 23 percent from the Gold Coast-based

42nd Ward. Up from 20.1 percent. And the 43rd Ward, in Lincoln Park, gave him 18 percent. Up from 16.3 percent.

Proving once again that if you give some rich guys a tax break, they're yours for life. Even if you endorse bleach as a cure for COVID.

Trump also gained among Latino voters. He won about 16 percent of the 12th Ward—which has the highest concentration of Latino voters in the city. He got 10.4 in 2016.

All in all, this says as much about Chicagoans as it does about Trump.

Think about it—Trump spent the better part of the last four years bashing Chicago, using us as a horror story to scare white people into voting for him.

His message was basically—*Hey, suburban white women, if you don't vote for me, your communities will turn into a hellhole like Chicago.*

Despite the hate, his vote tally grew as voters from Rogers Park to Mount Greenwood put on their MAGA hats. Even if many only wore them in the confines of their homes.

I suppose I should look on the bright side. Biden did win over 82 percent of Chicago's vote.

But at the risk of sounding like Dr. Freud—there do seem to be more self-hating Chicagoans around town . . .

Here's a trivia question for you: Who was the leading Republican vote-getter in Chicago?

I'll give you a hint—his name is not Trump.

The race for state's attorney

The honor belongs to Pat O'Brien, the former Democrat who unsuccessfully ran for Cook County state's attorney.

He got about 29 percent of the Chicago vote in his race against Kim Foxx. That's up from the 18 percent that the last Republican who ran against Foxx got in 2016.

Now, here's an even tougher trivia question: Who ran against Kim Foxx in 2016? Don't cheat by looking it up on your cell phone. OK, time's up, people.

His name's Christopher Pfannkuche. Oh, don't act like you know that.

In 2016, Pfannkuche won 187,783 votes in Chicago. In contrast, O'Brien won over 285,000. That's quite a leap.

O'Brien had a couple of things working in his favor. Number one is his name—we all know how much Chicagoans can't resist voting for Irish names.

Secondly, there was Smollettgate. Or Foxx's clumsy—to put it mildly—handling of the Jussie Smollett situation. I'll spare you another recitation of that debacle.

Also, there was the summer's unrest, which O'Brien blamed on Foxx, though she had absolutely nothing to do with it.

(By the way, in the 14th congressional election, James Oberweis blamed the unrest on Congresswoman Lauren Underwood, which is just as preposterous as blaming it on Foxx. Seems like a popular tactic for old white Republicans is to blame younger Black women for looting.)

O'Brien was a huge hit in MAGA land, outpolling Trump in the 19th and 41st Wards.

He even won the 13th Ward, out by Midway Airport. That happens to be the home ward of House Speaker Michael Madigan.

That's correct. Madigan—the all-powerful chair of the state Democratic Party—could not carry his ward for Foxx. A Democrat.

That tells me Madigan wasn't exactly sticking his neck out for an unpopular candidate. Or maybe he's not so all-powerful anymore.

Not very reassuring in either matter, Dems.

Fortunately for Foxx, she was saved by big turnout in the Black wards, where she got over 90 percent of the vote.

But even there, O'Brien outperformed Pfannkuche—a name that doesn't get easier to spell, even with practice.

O'Brien, running on a law-and-order message, got over 5 percent of the vote in the Black wards. Up from the 2 percent Pfannkuche won.

OK, that's not much. But it suggests that the law-and-order message has some resonance in wards hit hardest by crime—which also explains why not all Black aldermen are jumping aboard the defund-the-police movement.

O'Brien's biggest gains came in the land of milk and honey—the Gold Coast, Lincoln Park, and other upscale north-side areas.

In the 42nd Ward he ran so strong that Alderman Brendan Reilly—who's also the Democratic committeeman—dumped Foxx and endorsed O'Brien.

O'Brien won over 50 percent of the vote in the 42nd. Up from the 37 percent Pfannkuche won in 2016.

No doubt this is a backlash to the looting that O'Brien blamed on Foxx, even though—again, and I can't repeat this enough—she had nothing to do with it.

Before I get too depressed about all of this, let me point out that Gold Coasters and Lincoln Parkers restrained themselves. As I already noted, most of them voted for Biden.

So they settled on Foxx as the scapegoat for the looting. And managed not to go full MAGA. How's that for looking on the bright side? Told you I wasn't going to be a Debbie Downer . . .

Finally, there's the matter of which ward wins the coveted dumbest voters of the year award.

I know—I promised no more voter shaming. But, c'mon folks, allow me one last indulgence.

Geez, people, you voted no on the Fair Tax?

Congratulations to the voters of the 41st Ward, where over 61 percent of the electorate voted against the Fair Tax amendment.

Even though many of these voters are public employees—either retired or active—who will be living on a pension in their golden years.

I really don't want to launch into another recitation of the Fair Tax—which my beloved Democratic Party managed to make a mess of.

Suffice to say it would have been a bonus for pensioners.

State law prohibits pensions—or any retirement income—from being taxed. The Fair Tax amendment would not change that.

Alas, hedge fund billionaire Kenny G and his rich buddies launched the infamous Phyllis commercial, where they found a retiree in Park Ridge willing to say the Fair Tax amendment would tax retirement income.

Apparently folks on the southwest and northwest sides bought that lie hook, line, and sinker. Either that or they hate Dems so much they voted no just because Governor Pritzker wanted them to vote yes.

Whatever the case, they essentially voted to cut their own throats. Metaphorically speaking.

Their no vote was even higher than the one on the Gold Coast—where the richest of the rich reside. So, you might say the Gold Coast and the Bungalow Belt voted against their self-interests.

Overall, over 70 percent of Chicagoans voted yes on the Fair Tax. The biggest support came from the Black wards—where the vote ran over 80 percent.

But it got crushed elsewhere in the state. And it failed.

Now that same bunch who financed the Phyllis ad will probably look to advance a constitutional amendment to cut pensions.

At which point all those pensioners in the 41st Ward will ask other voters—including Black voters—to come to their rescue.

I got bad news for you, northwest-siders. In this case, Ice Cube, who's a billionaire, probably won't be on your side.

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Bisa Butler. *Southside Sunday Morning*, 2018. Private collection. © BISA BUTLER. PHOTO BY MARGARET FOX.

CULTURE

This is not a painting

Bisa Butler's quilts find inspiration in historic photos of Black American life.

By Deanna Isaacs

The first and only time I've seen Bisa Butler's artwork "in the flesh" was at EXPO 2018, at Navy Pier.

I'd never heard of her before catching sight of her extraordinary portraits on the walls of the Claire Oliver Gallery booth. EXPO featured 135 galleries that year, displaying the work of thousands of artists. I was, as usual, cruising the aisles with an eye out for the Chicago folk. Claire Oliver is a New York Gallery; Butler lives in New Jersey, but it didn't matter. The work was irresistible: nearly life-sized images of people who seemed to have stepped from some familiar moment in the last century into an alternative universe of swimming color and cacophonous pattern—their skin glowing ocher and fuchsia and blue, their nuanced expressions and mostly direct gaze fully readable. From a distance they registered as paintings, though uneasily. The medium seemed indefinite. Paint on fabric? Mixed media collage?

It was only when I got nose to nose with them that I saw—with disbelief—what they really are. Butler is a quilt maker. She "paints" in fabric.

I wasn't the only one who had this reaction. Erica Warren, associate curator of textiles at the Art Institute of Chicago, says she also happened upon Butler's work at EXPO 2018 and was "blown away by it." When she inquired about purchasing a piece for the museum's collection, she learned that all of the work had sold within the first hour of the EXPO preview.

The Art Institute wound up purchasing a subsequent piece, *The Safety Patrol*, which will be on view here for the first time in a solo exhibit, "Bisa Butler: Portraits," opening to the public at the Art Institute next week. The exhibit will include 22 of Butler's quilts, most of them created in the last few years, though she's hardly an emerging artist: she's been doing this kind of work for two decades.

So why haven't we seen it before now? There's a history of marginalization of fabric art and quilting as "women's industry," a subject Warren explores in the show's generously illustrated catalogue. And then there's what Butler told me in a phone interview last week: "I think the main deal is the segregation of the art world."

As an undergraduate art major at Howard University, Butler focused on painting—"sketching, studying the human form, learning to achieve three-dimensional effects just using light and dark or color." But her mother and grandmother had taught her to sew (and to appreciate fabric) as a child. She made her first quilt in 2001, while completing a master's degree in art education. Conceived as a gift for her grandmother, and based on her grandparents' wedding photograph, it set her trajectory: "I think more like a painter," she says, "but my medium is fabric."

Vintage photos that capture Black life and history, like those from her family's albums and, more recently, from the Library of Congress, are her starting point. Eliminating backgrounds, she enlarges and sometimes combines them, sketches and cuts patterns, and selects, layers, and stitches fabric—intentionally symbolic, often African prints. It's a painstaking process: her latest, a 10-by-12-foot Great Migration piece, took 2500 hours to complete.

Butler first exhibited her quilts in 2003, and continued to make them during 13 years of teaching art in New Jersey high schools, showing mostly in galleries operated by friends or friends of friends. "I wasn't trying only to show or sell my art at Black galleries, but those were the people around me, and those were the opportunities I had," she says. "If I did a group show, it would be at something like an African American museum in the city. The mainstream art scene in New York wasn't aware that I was doing anything."

That changed in 2017, when Oliver walked past a window in Harlem, spotted Butler's work in a benefit show of art by Howard University alumni, and began taking it to the international fairs. The pieces she brought to EXPO two years ago included *Southside Sunday Morning*, based on an iconic image by Farm Security Administration photographer Russell Lee, captured in Chicago on Easter Sunday, 1941.

The striking thing about Lee's photo of five elegantly dressed Black boys posed on the hood of a vintage automobile is their direct confrontation of the viewer. The striking thing about Butler's version of it, which will be included in the Art Institute exhibit, is how much she turns up the heat on that.

"Bisa Butler: Portraits" runs November 14-April 19 and was co-organized with the Katonah Museum of Art, where it was on view over the summer.

@Deannaisaacs

AMBER HUFF

PANDEMIC CHEER

We'll stay home for Christmas?

Reader staffers on what holidays look like in 2020.

By *Reader* staff

ESPECIALLY AS THE pandemic continues to escalate, going home for the holidays this year doesn't really feel like an option.

Sure, we all ran the scenarios, trying to figure out how we could quarantine beforehand, get tested, wear masks, the whole shebang. But at the end of the day, there's a really clear worst-case scenario here that I'd like to avoid, and it's not me missing Christmas.

Of course, every move during a pandemic is a choice, a calculated risk here, a small concession there. So I could just do it, and book a plane ticket, and Uber to the airport, and fly home, and pretend everything is normal because I want to. But I've tried to be so careful since the start of the pandemic that the idea of bringing my big city germs to small town upstate New York, where my parents and sisters will be celebrating, seems like an obviously bad idea.

And when I think about the decision to spend Thanksgiving and Christmas without my family, on the surface, it's OK. I take a deep breath and remind myself not to push my luck, that it's a miracle I haven't felt the effects of COVID up close and personally, that it'll be worth it next year when we can all be alive and healthy and together. I still have the best partner in the world, and with two new kittens, we're creating our own little family for holiday celebrations.

But then it's like the devil appears on my other shoulder, telling me to just say, "fuck it, life is short and the world is ending anyway." I see people on social media taking vacations, enjoying restaurants, and seeing their parents, so why shouldn't I? (I know why.)

So I'm stuck in this incessant loop, but I'll stay in Chicago, missing for the first time the Christmas traditions my family has cultivated over the decades. I'll miss waking up too early in matching pajamas, eating cinnamon rolls as first breakfast and casserole as second breakfast, watching my dog search for presents under a tree decorated with a string of lights as old as I am, hanging on by a wire. My mom recently called it a double-edged sword, the fact that I was raised with so many rigid and beloved family holiday traditions. They're the best to celebrate and pass on to next generations, but when you lose them, it hurts twice as much.

But in the end, I'd rather lose those traditions temporarily than permanently, so I guess that's that. **—Taryn Allen**

FOOD HAS ALWAYS been what brings my family together. When my folks call to check in, more often than not it devolves into 15 minutes of rattling off recipes, peppered (pun intended) with phrases like "it's the fresh lime that makes all the difference" or "the secret is just a smidge of mustard." Even before I stepped into the kitchen to start regularly cooking for myself (a recent quarantine-induced habit), I have been a culinary confidant to my father as he planned out family meals, especially as the moments that my siblings, parents, and I can all be gathered in one place are fewer and farther between. And the most elaborate of those meals always come around the holidays, a menu of mythic proportions featuring a mix of traditional Wellen-family dishes, a trendy new Food Network recipe, and at least one serving of cranberry sauce still in the shape of the can. It takes weeks to plan, days to cook, and only minutes to disappear into our pieholes. The meal will barely be over before talk of what we can try next year begins.

Up until now, there's only been one holiday family meal I've missed. In 2018 I was visiting my best friend in Portland, Oregon, during Thanksgiving. We did in fact have a home-cooked dinner of our own planned, but the chef in question ended up being too sick to host. So instead my friend and I found ourselves wandering through a drizzly Portland neighborhood looking for somewhere, anywhere that was open and willing to serve. As luck would have it, we stumbled upon a Chicago-themed bar that was simultaneously playing the parade, the dog show, and football on TVs perched on the walls. Surrounded by Cubs memorabilia, we ordered hot dogs and beer. The owner brought us slices of pie and we chatted about our favorite Chicago things. The night ended with a visit to check on our sick friend, where we drank hot toddies while watching *Christmas Vacation* to cure her ailments. It's one of my favorite Thanksgivings, one that shifted my perception of what a "traditional" holiday meal can be.

This year, of course, there will be no hot dogs in bars. My family and I have decided to not gather in-person at all, let alone over our usual smorgasbord. This year instead, my parents will send me and my siblings pizza money, and we'll enjoy our slices with each other during a virtual game night over Zoom. In a way, not making it about the food is making it more about our time together. And while I have no doubt that once we can be together in the same physical space again we will enjoy one of the most extravagant dinners we've ever eaten, there's something to be said about stripping it all away and redefining our traditions. **—Brianna Wellen**

LOUISIANA FEELS LIKE it's a world away, sweltering in the December sun. I always overpack because by the time snow starts falling in Chicago my skin has lost all the warmth of August. I forget how to plan for a 65-degree day and end up with trench coats instead of sweaters or bikinis instead of T-shirts.

These days it's hard to think about air travel without conjuring images of William Shatner in *The Twilight Zone*, with the coronavirus acting as the specter on the wing inching its way toward us. So, we'll drive. We'll move down through the country watching frost melt and accents thicken like gravy. As we drive deeper into the country, we'll see fewer masks and begin to wonder if our two-week quarantine was enough, or, conversely, even worth it. Every convenience store we enter will be another point of possible contagion.

Our grandmother, deep into her 90s, will await our arrival anxiously. She can't attend church any longer and feels more lonesome than ever. By the time we reach her our masks will need cleansing and our bodies will ache. A heated argument will take place within me, one screaming the depths of my irresponsibility while the other asks if this is the last Christmas I'll ever spend with her. Then again, maybe it is my presence in her home that guarantees that?

She'll serve us biscuits dripping in butter and give us updates about distant cousins we've all but forgotten about. I'll fight back yawns and relish in the familiar banality of this tradition. She doesn't have Internet so we won't be able to obsess over global crises. Instead we'll delve into neighborhood gossip and laugh over her amazement of Zoom.

At long last, the new year will send us back north. We'll promise to call and, like our new year's resolutions, forget until next December. **— Colette Willard**

I USED TO say I loved being alone. After a long day of work, I relished coming home, smoking some weed, and watching mindless television to unwind from a stressful day of reporting. I used to say I was alone, not lonely. But I don't think I really knew what being lonely was until now.

Quarantine hit nearly halfway into my graduate degree. The friends I had made from September to mid-March suddenly fled to far corners of the country and the globe as borders closed, flights were canceled, and any sense of normalcy was halted. There's little confidence that I'll see some of them ever again, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel robbed of these friendships.

The walls I so meticulously decorated when I moved into this apartment now feel like they're closing in. The tchotchkes I've collected over the years have stopped bringing me joy, and now they just feel like dust collectors and paper weights. This apartment feels like a coffin, and it's hard not to be afraid that it will become one.

But despite all of that, nothing has made me feel more profoundly lonely than having to call my mom to tell her that I won't be coming home for the holidays. I, like millions of others, have had to make a tough choice that a shitty holiday in my apartment alone is infinitely better than exposing my immunocompromised mother and nonagenarian grandparents.

One season of holidays alone is worth even the possibility of more to come; but as the realities of climbing cases and a basically abandoned federal effort to manage the pandemic set in, this loneliness has turned at least in part to contempt for those flouting basic safety guidelines, and a fear that the loneliest days are still ahead.

I frankly don't know how we come back from this, from a world where so many people put their own comfort and convenience over the safety of their neighbors; a world where people are stabbed, beaten, or spit on for asking others to take minimal safety measures; a world where people would happily sacrifice neighbors to be able to drink in a bar again.

I'm afraid that divide we face now seems irreparable. How do I look in the face of people who have ignored the pandemic, people who have been so insulated by privilege and self-interest that a medical mask feels like a straightjacket? How do we trust each other again? I don't know the answer to any of these questions, frankly.

But my biggest fear is that the world ahead looks even more lonely than it does now. **—Adam M. Rhodes**

THE TOUGHEST PART of any crisis is when the matter at hand starts to tear apart the quilt of compromise that had previously been covering up the essence of each interpersonal relationship. My friend who doesn't live in Illinois wants to come visit me after Thanksgiving. We've been going back and forth about it for a while, mostly me concerned about that person spending money on travel, but then they texted, "I want to drive out but I'm going to wait till the last minute to decide (because COVID numbers) but I'm not even sure what we'll do when I get there." Are we able to have a conversation without a turkey in front of us? Will this friendship survive not having an outside activity? And now that the text lives in my phone, I look at it now and again and think, *oh shit, is this a good idea to begin with?* We're much better when we're standing together looking at a band playing in a bar, or at the very least trying on discount pants together with our respective stashes of Kohl's Cash.

Before I can worry too much about my culpability in this friendship, I chat briefly with a relative who always throws a kick-ass, huge December holiday social, the kind where there's no real guest list and everyone brings extra people and you all end up solving the world's problems in the wee hours of the morning while sitting on the front lawn. I ask them, *what are you doing this year instead of the party?* "I guess we'll just have dinner with a few of us, you and your brothers can come over, but I'd rather have the party, I like the party." *I'm not sure if I want to come over; can we plan for a video version just in case?* "Oh sure," they sigh. "I guess. It's just not the same." And they're right. It's not really the same on video.

Maybe I won't do anything social for Thanksgiving, Christmas, or New Year's Eve, but honestly, it wouldn't be the first time that ever happened. I'm happy to do midnight mass at home, watching online. I can eat a turkey TV dinner and fall asleep early.

I do plan to decorate the crap out of my house. I've been doing this for the last few years: after a period of depression kept me off balance for a few months, I opened a box and found some Snoopy holiday flags and got hooked. I'm single, I don't have kids, and I own a Department 56 Christmas Village. I can't get a tree because my dog will pee on it (he's cute, not smart), but I'm going to do the lights and make a wreath for my front door. I have no plans on anyone coming over to see it. I'm not interested in taking camera photos of it to assault my Instagram followers with. I'm just going to enjoy what I have and be grateful for whatever happens next. I think that's all anyone really can do. **—Salem Collo-Julin**

BUYING A CAR was the latest action in a series of what I like to call "pandemic bingo": I cut my hair, quit my job, baked bread, cleaned out my closet, started a new job, bought furniture, adopted a cat (@phantomcatchicago), "redid" my home office, scrubbed my mini-blinds, started a podcast, and made a major purchase. All since March. I have not started dating anyone, thankfully, so I'm not yet hitting a full COVID-19 bingo card. (Additional bingo squares include learning a new language, crying in public, taking an online class, gardening/buying plants, and dating a neighbor.)

In a normal year, I'd feel productive and accomplished, like I've really made strides. But let's be real: What's normal, at this point?

Normally, I'd fly "home" for Christmas. But my mom died last year, and I sold the house, so last Christmas in Virginia was the first, of what I expected would be many, bounce-from-house-to-house holiday weeks.

I've already dealt with the first wave of uncertainty that comes from losing my home base. In 2019, I didn't have a clear plan for Christmas dinner, my tree, or family ornaments, or even my old traditions. And I was recovering from major abdominal surgery, and the death of a friend. (Seriously, 2019 sucked.)

So uncertainty about plans, and where to sleep, and who to see? I can handle it.

Here in Chicago, I haven't seen some of my closest friends since March. We talk about "friendsgivings," but COVID-19 cases/percentages are too high for me to feel comfortable enough to pierce a bubble. All of my extracurriculars are shut down (God, I miss comedy shows). And if I'm going to be alone in my apartment through December, why stay here? Why not head south for the winter, and come back hopeful for the spring?

So, I bought a car. Because I can drive to Virginia (with my computers, cat, and three months' worth of comfy work-from-home clothes) and stay with my best friend. I'll isolate, and get tested, so I can spend Christmas morning with my friends and their kids.

Thanksgiving will be a low-key affair with just my best friend, I think. But on Christmas Eve, I'll sleep in a small guest room in southeastern Virginia. I'll stay up too late laughing and talking about TV and movies with *The Great British Bake Off* playing in the background.

My goddaughter will wake me up at the crack of dawn, and I'll watch her and her sister open presents, the youngest goggling at the world because everything is so, so new and she can barely hold her head up, as their dad cooks breakfast. Hopefully no one pees on the floor, like last year.

This year is so unpredictable, that's the best plan I can create. And it's subject to change. But isn't everything in 2020? **—Amber Nettles**

Bound to the Point

Tales of the Southside Pod swimmers

By S. Nicole Lane

My clock says it's a few minutes before 6 AM. I said I would arrive at 5:30 but I miscalculated my morning and now I'm late. It's also cooler than I expected for a July morning. I dig for a sweater as I remember to also grab my mask. I walk along the cool grass of the park towards the south side of the Point, a man-made peninsula that curves into Lake Michigan in the Hyde Park neighborhood. The wind whips as I walk up to a group of seven to ten people all congregating on the rocks. A few dive in when I get there, and several already head toward the grey horizon. All I can see are their inflatable buoys shining pink, green, and yellow in the water. I know these people as the Point swimmers and I know them only from a distance.

I've called myself a "rock person" since moving to Chicago seven years ago. As someone who grew up along the beaches of the Carolinas, I broke up with sand a long time ago. The rocks along the shoreline of the Point are special to the area as they tumble, fall, and change after every winter. They warm you after a chilly swim in the lake. They create the perfect diving board. Children, who seem to know the rocks like the backs of their hands, hop, skip, and jump along the giant limestone boulders.

I've been hanging out with fellow rock people every summer and consider myself a decent swimmer. Unsalted and vast, the lake is home to one of my most cherished therapeutic practices. Because of my proximity, I've always known about the Point swimmers. I'll soon learn they also call themselves the Southside Pod, a pandemic and aquatic name that a few of them have printed on their swim caps in bubble letters. Two years ago when I joined the "Point Swimmers" Facebook page I was introduced to the photography of David Travis, the early morning swimmers, and the folks who swim all year long.

Travis, a sailor and photographer, began taking photos along the lake of cyclists and runners on the lakeshore path a few years ago when a friend suggested he take photos of the swimmers. Ever since, he's been capturing the athletes in the morning light. He sits on the rocks with the swimmers, watches their items as they dive in, takes the water temperature, and documents their swims.

"A lot of them are master swimmers," says Travis to me as we sit on the rocks. He points out swimmers by name and tells me about their skills, where they are from, and how often they come out. "It's the best place on the lake to swim," he says, something I agree with, but the sound of the wind and waves causes my voice to drift and I'm unable to audibly

agree with him. I just nod eagerly instead. The south side of the Point is protected from north winds, which makes it less choppy and wavy for swimmers. Travis points out another swimmer in the water. "She swims for the whole year." In February, she can be in the water for ten to 15 minutes. "I act as a valet," says Travis. When swimmers exit the water after four to ten minutes, Travis hands them gloves and clothing. Travis tells me about the time one swimmer got into the water for three minutes with gloves on and the velcro fasteners froze shut. Travis and the swimmer had to work together to pull the gloves off of his hands. "There's no explaining it. I just say they are different mammals," he says. Once the water temperature hits 50 degrees in November, many swimmers begin to fall back and retreat for the year. However, some of these athletes brave the Chicago weather and swim through the ice and negative wind chills. Lake Michigan waters don't typically drop below 32 degrees, which allows for swimmers to jump in, swim for approximately ten minutes, and hop back out. Travis even tells me about a swimmer who swam a circle through a thin sheet of ice one year, leaving a path in the frozen water. "God," I think to myself, "Will you make me a Point swimmer when I grow up?

I notice during my morning that for these swimmers, jumping into the lake is more than a quick shock or exercise. It's a mental necessity. *The British Medical Journal* has even reported a 2018 case study where a young woman struggled with depression and after swimming in 59-degree water, her mood improved and she was weaned off of antidepressants. I'm also reminded of Wim Hof, AKA The Iceman, who has boggled scientist's minds with his method of swimming in ice for prolonged periods of time. In a recent *Outside Magazine* feature, Susan Casey follows Hof and his followers to an ice bath in Iceland. Hof, who has a cult following, teaches workshops and classes where folks are introduced to cold baths and cold soaks. The Icelandic guru has defied science and claims to control his own body temperature, nervous system, and immune response (when scientists tried to prove he was an anomaly, they tested 12 of his trained volunteers and found the same results). Before plunging into the lagoon, Hof tells the journalist, "You gotta swim today! Yeah—it will be good! We'll go wild! We will sing in front of everybody! And we are gonna cut the crap and the bullshit and we are gonna *live*!" Whether you believe in Hof's superhuman way of life or not, there is no denying the life force that comes with the cold shock of water.

Alexandra Heminsley, author of *Leap In: a Woman, Some Waves and the Will to Swim*, details her experience with IVF and how swimming gave her solace. She says in *The Guardian*, "Because swimming outdoors is this constant confrontation of danger and the unknown, it reminds you that those tiny risks are worth taking. So in terms of just keeping my sanity, it was invaluable." Overcoming obstacles has been a huge component of swimming in open waters for many folks.

"Louise is a powerful swimmer," says Travis. She's in the water already before I meet her. Artist Louise LeBourgeois heads to the Point from Rogers Park two to three times a week. She prefers swimming on the south side and has been doing so for years, as she spent her teenage years in Hyde Park. On the day I'm at the Point, she swims towards the pier, and once she's about 50 yards from the mass that juts out into the water, she spots some other swimmers in the water nearby. She decides to swim back with the pod toward the rocks. The waves pound the shoreline as she shouts, "Welcome!" to me. "I've been swimming here since 1978." I end up meeting with LeBourgeois to discuss her paintings a week or so later. She is successfully represented by galleries in New York and Los Angeles and paints images of the lake and the vastness she experiences in the middle of the water. When I talk to her, I can feel the unwavering importance of the lake in her voice. It's something so tangible and simply beautiful. For LeBourgeois, swimming is everything. It's how she spends her mornings, and when she isn't swimming, she's in the studio painting her memories of swimming. It's all-encompassing.

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"This is a community of people. It's really, really beautiful. I feel so fortunate to be a part of it." 📷
DAVID TRAVIS

These swimmers spend their mornings together, resulting in strong friendships between many of them. Others finish their swim and go to work. "There's an English professor and a doctor out there in the water," says Travis as more folks roll in to catch the morning chill. There's an 80-year-old woman, Rosie, who visits occasionally from the UK and has done the Channel twice. Some folks drive in from the suburbs. Everyone here loves one thing, and as a result, they all get along.

Several folks say good morning to Travis as they walk up and strap on their buoys and goggles. Almost everyone asks him what the water temperature is. It's a bit cooler on this July day than earlier in the week—70 degrees. "It's been up to 76 degrees," he tells me. The temperature of the lake depends on the wind coming from Michigan or Indiana. Travis explains, "When you get a southwest wind, which is usually a warmer wind—anything coming from Louisiana—it's always warm." The warm water is typically blown out to the middle of the lake and an undertow coming up from the bottom will drop the temperature ten degrees overnight where folks swim. Our conversation is interrupted again when someone asks Travis what the temperature is. The swimmer shimmies into her wet suit after hearing the answer. Everyone's preference is slightly different. "70 degrees?! That's too warm for me," says one swimmer. Some like it hot, some like it cold.

"Oh, Susan! You're back!" exclaims Travis to a California-based swimmer who used to live in Hyde Park. Susan completed the Lake Tahoe swim by being in the water for 17 hours and 44 minutes. While she's in town for a short trip, she can't help but head to the Point and reconnect with her old friends. "Hi Susan!" shout a few others as they exit the water. The water is swelling as it washes over the rocks—the lake's water is the highest it's ever been this year. "Lake Michigan is so unpredictable," Susan tells me. "One of the toughest swims I ever did was one of the Big Shoulders swims," which is a 5K and 2.5K swim at Ohio Street Beach. "This is a community of people. It's really, really beautiful. I feel so fortunate to be a part of it," she says. By this point, the rocks are filled with swimmers chatting, changing into warmer clothes, and drying their hair.

Travis brings a deck brush whenever he can to scrub off the slippery rocks for the swimmers where they've collected algae. There is a ladder and a cable located on the south side of the Point for easier access. However, most folks dive in. The area where we are seated is a perfect destination for swimmers. The buoys in the lake serve as markers for folks to go buoy to buoy. The pier that guards the entrance to the harbor behind the Museum of Science and Industry is one marker where a further pier guards the entrance to the Jackson Park harbor. Several swimmers create a route, going pier to pier and then back to shore, whereas others go to the furthest pier and circle around to the north side of the Point for a look at downtown Chicago before heading back. "These are real open water swimmers," says Travis. "They don't like doing laps. They like doing distance."

The legendary Ted Erikson, 92, was the first person to swim across Lake Michigan in 1961 and still swims with those in Hyde Park. In 1965 he set the world record of double-crossing the English Channel and embarked on a 31.5-mile swim to the Golden Gate Bridge from Farallon Islands in San Francisco in 1967.

Since 2001, many south siders, along with Erikson, have been fighting the United States Army Corps of Engineers, who want to remove the Point's unique limestone blocks and replace them with the concrete seawall we see along other areas of the lake in Chicago. In 2003, Ben Joravsky wrote in the *Reader* that Hyde Parkers—seeing what happened on the north side—grew uneasy at the idea that their Point would be structurally altered. "This piece of the park, with landscaping by Alfred Caldwell, is one of Hyde Park's most treasured spots," wrote Joravsky. Despite the seawall being an eyesore, swimmers also state that it will change the waves for swimming on the south side of the point.

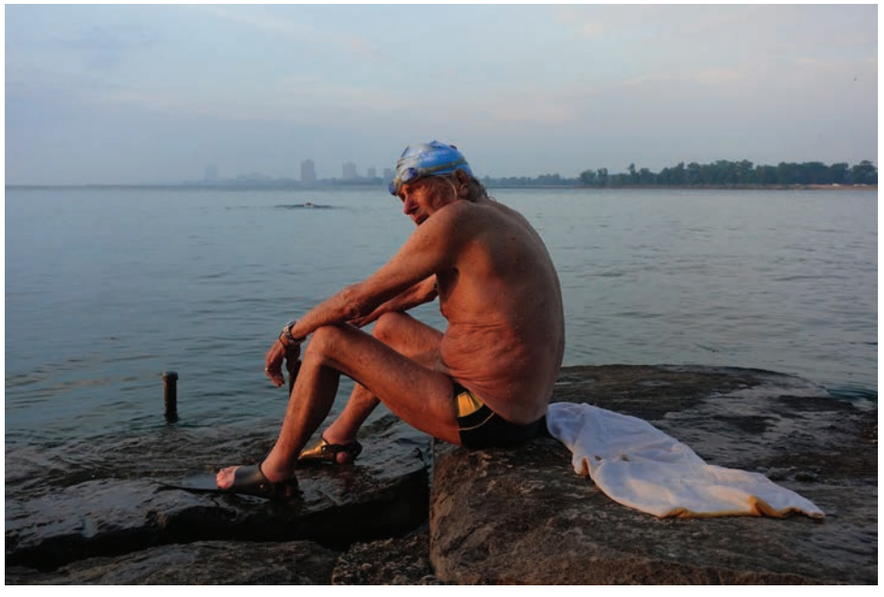
"Here's my big message," says Karl, walking over to me as the waves thrash behind him. He says that the seawall will change the water quality as it has the rest of the lake. "The waves come in and they bounce off and you get all of this chop. It's gonna suck. This is our one natural resource." When you swim on the north side of the Point where a seawall was installed, he says that the water quality has definitely changed. "The only people who care are us," he says. Plans to alter the Point, and surrounding seawalls, have been in flux for years with no real concrete resolution.

It's like a choreographed dance—weaving in and out of people talking, swimmers exiting the water, other folks drying off, says Travis. He walks over to people, snaps their photo, and shares a short conversation with them. Later on, I'll see these images on the Point Swimmers Facebook page.

Before this morning, I always assumed anyone swimming could be called a "Point swimmer." I might have even called myself one once before. But the longer I stay sitting firmly planted on the rocks, the longer I realize I am a complete novice. "You aren't going to join us?" says a swimmer to me. She's strapping on her swimming cap. She retells the first time she saw a swimmer exiting the water. "They all looked so happy and I thought to myself, 'I should try it.'" And so she did. Her first swim at Ohio Street left her thrilled. "I did it! I did it, ya know? Once you start doing it, you don't want to stop," she says before heading off into her morning cleanse.

It's tradition, after swimming, to head into

One of the Point swimmers dips into an icy lake on a winter day. DAVID TRAVIS



Ted Erikson, 92, was the first person to swim across Lake Michigan in 1961 and still swims with those in Hyde Park. DAVID TRAVIS

the neighborhood to grab a coffee. Deirdre, AKA the Den Mother, leads the way towards Medici, a neighborhood favorite, where we sit in a park around a fountain and chat. They talk about personal plans, they discuss family and friends, and of course, they talk about swimming. By this time it's 9 AM. "What do you want to know about us?" they ask me. I want to ask them how I can grow up to be just like them. But instead, I sit there a bit speechless, sipping my coffee, trying not to fan girl too hard. I don't want to come off as a young girl too eager and too obsessed. A few of them called me a "reporter," which sits strange in my mouth. I didn't want to appear too exploitative, another so-called reporter working their beat. I wanted them to know that I know about the magic of the lake, too. I've felt that cold rush, that exhilaration, the calm that comes from hanging onto a buoy as the sun sets over the Chicago skyline. It's the divine power of Lake Michigan and it's irresistible once you have a taste.

The rest of the city is waking up and the Southside Pod have already baptized themselves in the lake. They've been christened by the great body of water, and I was lucky enough to spend a morning with them.

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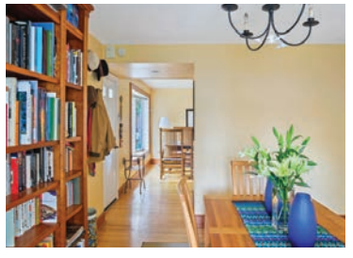

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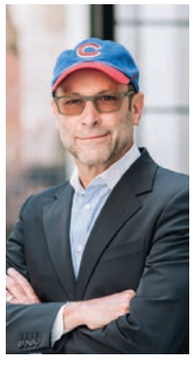

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The Sprawl: Reconsidering the Weird American Suburbs
By Jason Diamond (Coffee House Press)

Jason Diamond COURTESY THE AUTHOR

LIT

Back in the burbs

Author Jason Diamond reflects on his Chicagoland suburban-spiration.

By Megan Kirby

When writer Jason Diamond grew up in Chicago's north suburbs, he couldn't wait to escape. But after a couple decades in Chicago and New York City, his latest essay collection brought him back to the burbs. *The Sprawl: Reconsidering the Weird American Suburbs* (Coffee House Press) examines the culture, history, and distinctly American art that forms outside-but-adjacent to city life. Diamond writes in the book's intro: "I never looked back—until I did."

Today, Diamond lives in Brooklyn and visits Chicagoland often. From North Shore mansions to Wilmette pancake houses, he talks to us about his top suburban spots—some still standing, and some living only in memory.

Megan Kirby: Most haunted place?

Jason Diamond: The Schweppe Mansion. You know Schweppes, like the soda? It's probably one of the last grand old North Shore mansions. It's always coming up as the most haunted real estate listing in America. Charles Schweppe killed himself in there. He left a note, and it's so weird. "I've been up all night, and it's terrible." That's all the note said.

Best spot to hit the mosh pit?

I used to go to shows at the Arlington Heights Knights of Columbus. There's this Instagram account that's been up for the last few months of old Chicago flyers, and it's all shows that I went to. In Crystal Lake, they had a nature center that I remember in the mid- to late-90s was booking punk shows. It makes me feel kind of funny and old. Knights of Columbus is the greatest spot in the world—besides Fireside.

Best olfactory memory?

In the grand scheme of Jewish Chicagoland upbringings you were either closer to Northbrook Mall or you were closer to Old Orchard. And I remember, there was this one dark corner of Northbrook where the tobacco store was. Everything in the mall was super bright and lit up and then there was this dark little corner. And it smelled so nice. It smelled like *Masterpiece Theatre* or something. I went back and tried to find it, and I was like, "Oh, they really made this mall nicer." They really shouldn't have done that. They should have just let it rot like the other malls.

Best spots to revisit?

I definitely go to the Lake Forest library and the Skokie library. The Lake Forest library is just so cozy and so beautiful.

I try to make it to the Walker Brothers pancake house in Wilmette as much as possible. I like to go when it's snowing because it reminds me of taking rides with my grandfather. If you're ever been there—and there are other Walker Brothers—but this one especially has a lot of Tiffany glass. It has a real fern bar feel to it. I could see it, in the 80s, turning into a late-night club when everyone was done getting pancakes. That's one of the places I always try to go back to, just cause it connects me back. I'm really cool—I go to the library and I go to the pancake house.

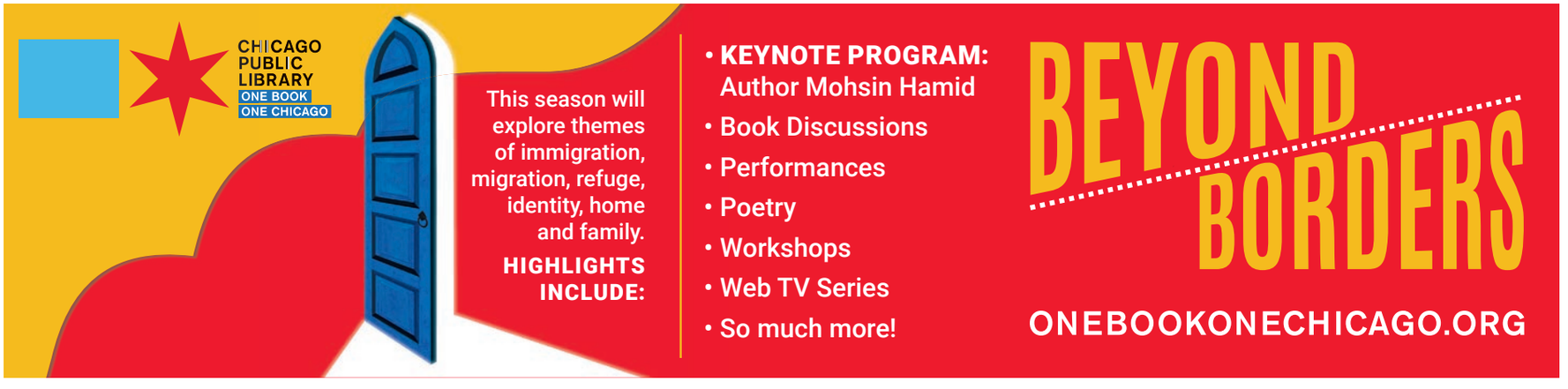
The best spot to almost die?

The Polar Dome [in East Dundee]. I used to play hockey there a lot. It was in Santa's Village. It was such an odd place for a hockey rink, but so incredibly cozy. I remember the boards by the Zamboni were a death trap. The ice was sunken in one corner, but if you survived, the hot cocoa after was great.

A dearly departed spot you miss the most?

Barnum & Bagel. Anybody who spent any time in Skokie probably knows it. I think about it every single day.

@megankirb



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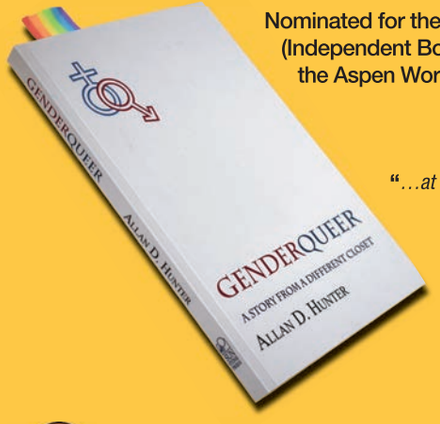

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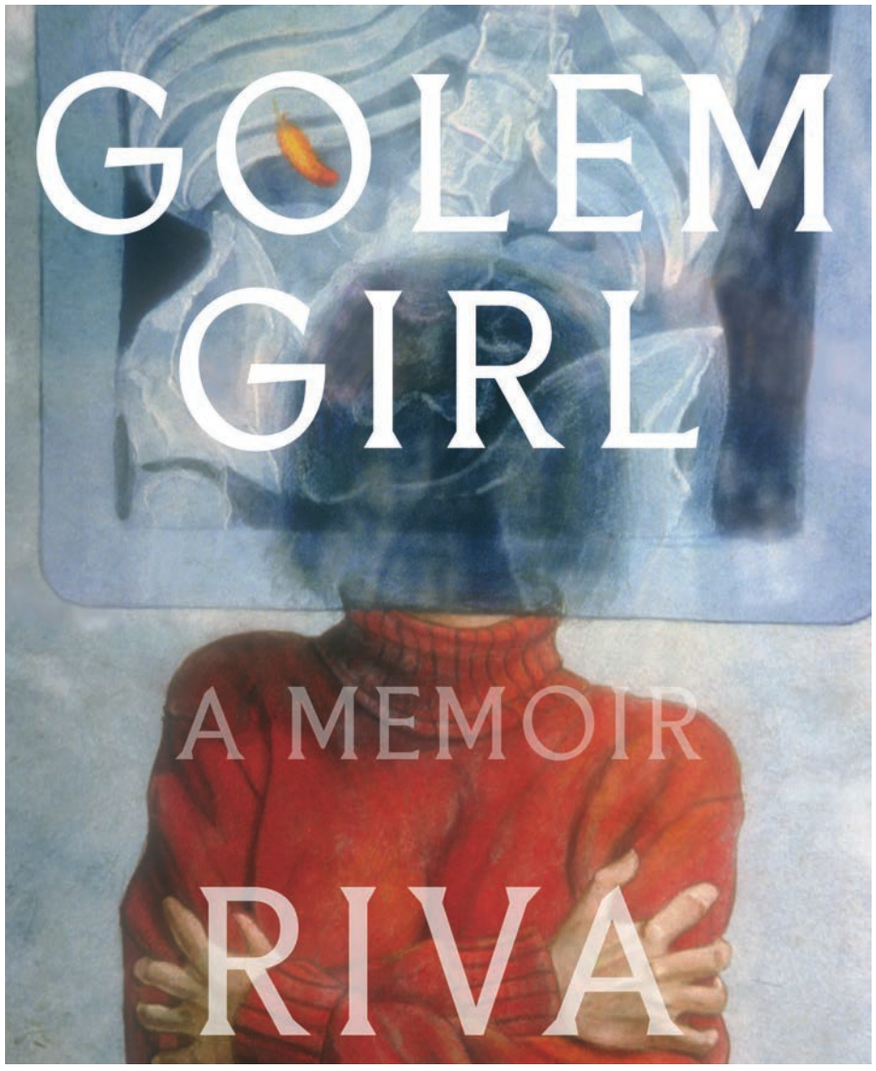

BOOK REVIEW

Golem Girl unpacks queerness, intimacy, and disability

In 1958, the mortality rate of children born with spina bifida was 90 percent. Riva Lehrer tells her story of beating those odds.

By S. Nicole Lane

My nightstand is a graveyard of books left open and abandoned. It isn't their fault really. It's hard to slow down a racing mind, especially one that works in media, reading words all day long. Before quarantine, I would read on the bus or before a meeting, or on my lunch break. My home is my office now and that means I work late into the night—there isn't a clear line of when to "clock out." Books have subsequently taken a back seat.

But I read *Golem Girl*—swiftly—in a week.

Riva Lehrer, artist and writer, was born with spina bifida in the late 50s when the birth defect meant a death sentence. Lehrer's debut memoir, *Golem Girl* (One World), is written in two parts, starting before she was even born by detailing her parents' marriage. She writes about the bond with her mother, her mother's disability, the surgeries she lived through, and her early education. The second part focuses on finding her sexuality, relationships, her art career, and the community she finds as a queer adult. It's a stunning telling that takes the reader through a range of emotions. I experienced anger, frustration, laughter, tears, and even developed a little crush on Lehrer while diving into her life story.

In the memoir, Lehrer references her disability and how she physically stands out in a crowd, especially when she was young. At her time at Condon, a small school she attended in Cincinnati, she says they were all "medical monsters." In her footnote she writes, "I'm not ever saying that's how they saw themselves, or that they were evil, freakish, or anything negative whatsoever. I am saying that's how we were often treated in the world; as disturbances, threats, as frightening or pitiable creatures, not as young humans on their way to human lives."

Golem, in Jewish folklore, is a clay figure brought to life through magic. It is meant to reference something unfinished, like a monster. In *Golem Girl* Lehrer takes back the meaning of the word, reappropriating it, and referencing it frequently as she finds her place in the world. She proves that she's a force to be reckoned with.

For much of Lehrer's life, even when she had a long-term boyfriend, family and friends told her she couldn't be loved or desired sexually. Doctors agreed with her mother that sex and motherhood were out of the question. After undergoing a hysterectomy at a young age, Lehrer asks her doctor if she will ever be able to have sex. The doctor dismisses her and says, "Riva, I thought you were a *nice* little girl. I cannot believe what you just asked me." Lehrer describes the involuntary sterilization of disabled women and how this violent procedure still happens to those who are intellectually disabled. "I know that no one, back then, expressed a single word of sorrow at the loss of my ability to procreate," she writes. While she may not be able to have children, she does prove that she is lovable. In the second part of the memoir, Lehrer writes beautifully about intimacy and relationships as she explores love, queerness, and coming out.

Lehrer's artistic works also look at gender identity and sexuality. Paintings created by Lehrer and photographs from her life are featured throughout the book. She clearly illustrates her autobiography and shows the reader how her artwork changed through the years and was impacted by personal experiences. It wouldn't be until 1994 while taking a class in Colorado at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center that she would be instructed to paint herself nude. After creating a cabana in the art studio to hide her body from the other students, she painted herself unclothed, exposed, and raw. The figure in the painting claws at the wall. After this moment, scars exposed, Lehrer writes that she was able to go forward. "I had no more secrets."

In 1996, she joined the Chicago Disabled Artists Collective in 1996 where she began to truly flourish and blossom. She reclaimed the word "crip" as she became ingrained in disability advocacy and a larger community. During the mid-90s, disability representation was changing and improving.

While the story begins with a child comparing herself to zoo animals at the Cincinnati Zoo, it ends by taking an inspiring and soulful look at disability culture. Written with humor and honesty, Lehrer takes us through necessary, cosmetic, and life-altering surgeries, as she tackles her sexual identity, friendships, family ties, and her art career. The girl on the operating table is transformed into the skin she lives in—"a queer crippled Jew with peculiar shoes, a dreadful, grievous monster." Readers see Lehrer grow—from page to page—into a radically visible advocate, teacher, curator, and human being.

"For most of my life, I had glanced at impairment and looked away, afraid to see myself. Now I looked slowly and deliberately. I let the sight come to me. And beauty arrived," she writes as she dives into the world of portraiture outside of self-portraiture and into her new community "I wanted crip beauty—variant, iconoclastic, unpredictable. Bodies that were lived in with intentionality and self-knowledge. Crip bodies were fresh."

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The creative team for Token Theatre's *Zac Efron*, clockwise from top left: Wai Yim, David Rhee, Telly Leung, Helen Young COURTESY TOKEN THEATRE

ONLINE ROM-COM

Crazy gay Asians

Token Theatre makes its debut with *Zac Efron*.

By IRENE HSIAO

Zac Efron: two-time winner of the MTV Movie Award for "best shirtless performance," four-time nominee and two-time Teen Choice "Male Hottie" winner, CinemaCon Comedy Star of the Year, and Golden Raspberry nominee for Worst Actor of 2018: what does he have to do with Asians? (Or Gaysians?)

"The American ideal: why does it have to be this white male?" says David Rhee, artistic director of new Asian American theater company Token Theatre. "What is it about Zac Efron that makes us feel inadequate?"

This question is the kernel of Token's debut play *Zac Efron*, cowritten by Rhee and actor and Token director of development Wai Yim—a rom-com about gay men looking for love while Asian. The company presents an online reading of scenes from the comedy this Thursday and Saturday, directed by Helen Young and starring Broadway veteran Telly Leung.

"Wai and I and another friend were talking about how plays and musicals [with Asians] always seem to end in tragedy. *Crazy Rich Asians* had just come out. I said, 'Holy cow, my dating apps have exploded!' Pre-*Crazy Rich Asians*, it didn't exist. Wai was like, 'Really? It's not happening for me!' So we're having this ridiculous conversation about how *Crazy Rich Asians* has been a paradigm shift for some Asians but not others. And my other friend says, 'Why don't you write a play about two Asians falling in love? No one has to die!'"

Rhee initially resisted. He was dead set on producing an all-Asian *Our Town* as Token's first play. "I am a classics/canon fiend," he says. "If I could do Shakespeare all the time, I would. You will not find anyone who loves *Death of a Salesman* more than me!" He cites a 2015 National Asian American Theater Company production of Clifford Odets's *Awake and Sing!* at the Public Theater in New York as a revelatory influence. "They were playing a Jewish family, and not one person in the audience went, 'Wait a minute!' They accepted it! Then *Hamilton* happened. [*Our Town*] would be a political statement—you keep on saying we don't belong here."

But Token's board voted and insisted—and thus are we graced with *Zac Efron*. "The default rom-com leads are Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling," says Token cofounder and managing director Erik Kaiko. "To know that Asian American characters are capable of witty banter and will-they-won't-they—we're taking those tropes and claiming them so people can see themselves there. I just watched [an animated retelling of a Chinese myth] *Over the Moon* on Netflix, and it used words like 'nainai,' which my daughter calls my mom. It caught me off guard because we're not used to hearing those parts of our culture in pop culture. If we put our stories in the forefront, it will give more of those moments for anyone who doesn't see themselves represented currently."

Recounting their experiences growing up (and acting) Asian in America, Rhee has actually done it all: appeared on Broadway in a Tony-winning production, worked with Steppenwolf, the Goodman, Lookingglass, and Silk Road Rising, starred on *Law and Order*, studied for an MFA in dramatic writing at the Tisch School of the Arts on full scholarship. But, he says, "I am not white. I am not tall, blond, blue-eyed. People say you've got to love yourself. It's easy to use that phrase when there's so many people like you. My whole upbringing in America is defined by what I'm not. Growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, I would say I was from Korea, but no one knew what Korea was. People would say, 'What's that?' I remember thinking, because I didn't know any better, I'd been in America my whole life, does this place even exist? This thing my mom and dad would always tell me about, this country of yours you keep telling me I'm a part of—I've never experienced it!"

Kaiko, who is half Chinese and half white and grew up in Connecticut, says, "I'm one of four kids, and we all have Chinese middle names. Growing up, we were often the only nonwhite kids in class. I would be shy about my middle name and not want to come forth with it—it was so different, it was othering. Without something like that, I could pass in many ways." But while studying acting as an undergraduate at Northwestern, he found that his chosen profession had a different opinion on the matter. "Despite the fact that I didn't grow up speaking Chinese, 'Chinese' became the forefront of what I was to directors and to other artists. That became the defining thing about me because the industry was treating Asian American artists that way."

He acknowledges Silk Road Rising for giving one of his first jobs out of school in a production of Julia Cho's *Durango*—"a nice, meaty, complex role that an Asian American actor would not have gotten, or [would have been] written ten years prior to that." Though Kaiko has performed with Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Porchlight Music Theatre, Marriott Lincolnshire, and others, the relative rarity of roles—and the reason why—pushed him to pursue producing. "Those experiences have motivated me to make the industry better for those who are underrepresented. I find I have a closer bond to my Asian roots than I did growing up, even though I'm not living with my family, and it means more as an adult because I see the injustice and discrimination more."

Rhee also cites the 2019 Wrightwood 659 exhibition "About Face: Stonewall, Revolt and New Queer Art" as crucial inspiration. "The artists took what was grotesque and made it beautiful. It was a celebration: 'This is who I am, you've made fun of it, I'm going to embrace it. I'm going to make it into art.' I remember thinking at that moment: 'This is what it's like for me to be Asian in America.' Here, Zac Efron becomes the ideal, everything these two characters are not. One is comfortable saying, 'I'm not him and I don't want to be him!' And the other one says, 'I'm not him, and the closest I can get is by dating Zac Efron.' What am I not because I don't represent this idea? Or, perhaps, what are you?"

@IreneCHsiao

Visceral Performance and Construction Tour
Nov 12-14, 5, 6, 7 and 8 PM; starts at Rockwell on the River, 3057 N. Rockwell, and ends at Visceral Dance Center, 3121 N. Rockwell, visceraldance.com, $15-$50.

Nick Pupillo KT MILLER

DANCE

That Visceral feeling

Nick Pupillo's company builds a new community space.

By Irene Hsiao

"My dream was to have a company. My dream was to create a space that was inclusive in every way, diverse, but really personable and connected," says Nick Pupillo, founder and artistic director of Visceral Dance Chicago. "It's in my body and my blood. My mom holds something in my scrapbook—in fifth grade I wrote about having a dance company someday! I always wanted to dance, but more than that, I loved programming, designing, producing, costumes, music—all the elements that go into it."

Pupillo began dancing at the age of four at the studio next to his parents' business in Munster, Indiana. "My parents were hairdressers. They owned a hair salon [the Chateau Bellissima]. I would be at my parents' salon, and I would always end up at the dance studio! I started learning tumbling, tap—I was there all the time. My dance teacher [Marilyn DeBarge] would also teach me privately in her basement. Her passion for teaching resonated with me. My parents were also passionate about what they did. Hairdressing is an art, and they invested and connected closely to their clients. It was a family-run business, and our clients were part of our family. Every client held me, fed me, took me to the park."

"In 1987, my dad took me to downtown Chicago, 33 minutes from where my parents worked—my dad's lucky number! I auditioned for the Ruth Page *Nutcracker* and received a scholarship to train in ballet at Ruth Page. My dad would drive me twice a week. I found a studio in Munster as well, where I started taking jazz. My teacher, Amy White Hanas, would drive to Chicago once or twice a week and take me with her [to Lou Conte Dance Studio]. She wanted me to be exposed, so I would take class with my dance teacher. That's when I would see Hubbard Street rehearse—I would be in Studio B taking class, and afterwards I would run over and see what was happening in Studio A. I was inspired by the vitality of the company, the diversity, the personality."

Pupillo majored in classical ballet at Indiana University on a full scholarship, but he suspected early on ballet would not be his future. "We had to take jazz for two semesters, and I signed up right away. And I wanted to teach jazz, too. I spoke to the director of our program, and she said, no, we don't need that." He fulfilled the program's teaching requirements with ballet classes, but, he says, "I wanted to teach more, and I kept pushing. Finally they added a jazz class on the roster—and there was a waiting list of 35 people. I ended up teaching three jazz classes a week."

Pupillo also began choreographing at IU—ballet, as per the program's requirements. "Violette Verdy, one of Balanchine's muses, was my teacher. She was strict and French; her fifth position was the tightest thing you've seen in your entire life. She was always good to me but knew I wasn't a classical ballet dancer. When we presented our choreography to the faculty, she pulled me into the hallway. I was so nervous! She said, 'This is your calling. This is your future. I see it now.'"

Verdy encouraged Pupillo to audition for Giordano Dance Chicago, where he performed for three years. Like many dancers, days rehearsing were followed by nights teaching, kids in the suburbs ("north side, west side, south side") and adults in the city—all while pursuing choreographic residencies at various colleges. When one studio where he had been training high school-age dancers closed in 2006, the parents urged him to continue. The result was the beginning of Visceral Studio Company and the impetus to centralize operations to his own studio. Visceral Dance Center opened in 2007 on the corner where Western, Diversey, and Elston meet, sandwiched between a diner and a car repair shop. Windowless and cavernous, it boasts some of the sweetest floors in the city and draws folks of all ages and many aims, from tots and parents in Baby & Me to producers for MTV, Disney, and Broadway. And of course, dancers: professional, preprofessional, recreational, retired—for classes, rehearsals, auditions, and something more—community.

Pupillo works seven days a week at his studio, teaching everything from beginning ballet to professional-level contemporary and choreographing and directing a youth company in addition to the main company—often with one of his three children dashing by the barres, strapped to his chest, or gripping a leg. "I'm stressed out every single day of my life, but I don't reflect," he says. "I do it for every dancer in my youth company, every dancer in my company, every faculty member, every student here. This pandemic has revitalized my goal of what this space provides. People were pretty hesitant when we reopened in July. I went back to working the front desk a lot. I saw everyone come in and everyone leaving, and I saw the difference, people smiling again, crying because of what it felt like to be part of this again. It revitalized why Visceral exists, why I've created it and worked hard for it. Art is necessary, and connecting through art is necessary. What we do in the studio for ourselves is one thing, but when we get to share it with other people and share it together, that's when it becomes really special."

Defying probability, Visceral is under expansion during the pandemic—and its new location, a few blocks away, with twice the number of studios and a river view, is under construction, after over a year of negotiations. Four times a day November 12-14, Pupillo, Visceral Studio Company, and Visceral Dance Chicago will welcome small groups of guests to tour the new space and witness their newest choreography. Visceral is a studio, a company, and a feeling: a combination of art, family, and community that continues to grow.

@IreneCHsiao

Black Harvest Film Festival
Through 11/30, siskelfilmcenter.org/bhff2020, $100 all-access pass, $50 festival pass for seven films or short-film programs, $10 individual screening, discounts for members.

Burden screens as part of the "Voices of Our Time" shorts program.

FEATURE

Black Harvest Film Festival is still a party

In its 26th year, the festival stretches itself in celebration—and in service.

By Arionne Nettles

When David Weathersby's *Thee Debauchery Ball* premiered at the Black Harvest Film Festival last year, it was followed by a party—a house music party, one that was a fitting reception for the documentary about Black music, community, art, and sexuality.

And Weathersby didn't have to come up with the idea or do it alone.

"We had the DJs from the documentary there, they spun fun for a few hours, and people partied and they basically kind of recreated what was on the screen at the event in the lobby," Weathersby says. "And that was just something that Black Harvest took upon themselves; they wanted to do it and they were so helpful in bringing that about."

This year is the Black Harvest Film Festival's 26th year and the fourth year Weathersby has been a part of the festival's community. It's that community, he says, that helped spark his documentary career.

"I always say that I don't feel like I'm a filmmaker without Black Harvest," he says. "They were the first festival I ever submitted anything to and got a response . . . The first project that I did, it changed everything for me: It showed me how to interact and it gave me a whole new world of people to kind of talk to, a community."

But this year's festival will look and feel different as Gene Siskel Film Center staff were forced to rework plans after COVID-19 hit in March. Like many organizations and businesses, the center thought it'd likely open again in a month. That didn't happen, and festival plans needed to be altered.

"It didn't take long for us to realize that there wasn't going to be any real thing anytime soon," says Barbara Scharres, director of programming at the Siskel. "And that we were going to have to really change our expectations, not only with regard to Black Harvest, but with regard to everything we do program-wise."

So the staff pushed the event from its usual summer date and gave filmmakers more time to finish their works. This year's festival opens November 6 completely online, with most programs remaining online for two weeks and with geo-blocked access, for local audiences only, to keep filmmakers eligible to apply for festivals in other cities. It will end with a closing night celebration on November 30 that includes a tribute to Chadwick Boseman and a showing of Mischa Webley's *The Kill Hole*—the first feature film Boseman starred in. The film originally screened at the festival in 2012.

The depth of the festival remains with ten feature films, more than 30 short films, a Chicago youth showcase, virtual conversations with filmmakers and film talent, and a mix of workshops and discussions with industry insiders. Of the films, many, like those included in a new shorts program called "Voices of Our Time," confront the very real issues of today.

"This year, we noticed that certainly that there's a concern among many filmmakers to address some of the burning questions of our time having to do with activism, with racism," Scharres says. "All of those films in different ways—whether satirically or very seriously—addressed some of those questions, and I think it's a really provocative program, because you get so many different perspectives on those questions within this one compact, short film program."

Weathersby's film is included in that shorts program. His entry this year is an animated documentary titled *The District, Part 1* and is about two retired Chicago police officers recalling their memories of a divided force and how they worked to reimagine how they policed the community.

"When Harold Washington was elected mayor [in 1983], there was a ton of white flight out of the district, and they basically left the district for dead but it became a predominantly Black police district," Weathersby says. "A lot of the topics that we're talking today about police reform, [the Black officers that remained] were doing in the mid-80s on their own after they had been kind of abandoned by the police department as a whole."

Also in true Black Harvest form, panels take the conversation from the screen to the filmmaking community. NK Gutiérrez, filmmaker and cochair of the Black Harvest Community Council, moderates the discussion "How Culture and Film Move Movements," which includes Weathersby as well as Pemon Rami, Michelle Boone, Lonnie Edwards, and Ashley O'Shay.

"Movement and change happens through art," Gutiérrez says. "And so it's up to us to use our platform and our voice and as we continue to rise, and our platform expands, that you utilize that power to speak for those who cannot."

The Black Harvest Community Council plays a critical role in supporting the festival's programming and is comprised of filmmakers, artists, actors, producers, and more advocates of film and the arts.

"What we do is, we really sit as an advisory board and support system to the film festival itself," Gutiérrez says. "Staff will bring different ideas to us and bounce them off of us, they also look to us for ideas, and then we figure out how to support making those ideas happen."

This year, the council has planned a creative way to give back to the Chicago community and incorporate social justice initiatives into the festival's planning. Along with filmmaker and council member Alessandra Pinkston,

Black Mama Sable

The District, Part 1

Gutiérrez came up with the idea to hire Black artists to create merchandise to sell for charity.

"So we at the Film Center had to look at: How do we leverage our privilege to give back to the Black community?" Gutiérrez says. "We've always given back to the Black community, but how do we stretch ourselves and do it even more? Where can we be better?"

The merchandise is called the Black Harvest 26 Collection, and 100 percent of proceeds will go to Sista Afya Community Mental Wellness, which is based on the city's south side and provides accessible and affordable care to Black women.

"If you want to change community, you want to change spaces, show up and support women, and most specifically, Black women," she says.

ILA Creative Studio founder Rachel Gadson is the artist behind the collection, which pays homage to the films that have shown at the festival over the past 26 years.

"Not only is this a celebration of such an impactful organization but also a celebration of elevating the voice of Black creators, which is something I am constantly driven to pursue," Gadson says. "It was such a warm and gratifying experience working with NK and the team in developing a visual depiction of what this 26th year of representation means: constant movement, regardless of its pace, toward the plight of inclusion of our stories, being seen, scene by scene."

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FILM

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Smooth Talk

NOW PLAYING

RR *Citizen Bio*

Directed by Trish Dolman this documentary explores the world of biohacking, a phenomenon otherwise known as DIY biology in which individuals conduct biological experiments outside of traditional research institutions, often testing on themselves. The focus of this film is Aaron Traywick, a biohacker who was found dead in a sensory deprivation tank in 2018. Half whodunnit, half deep-dive, Dolman interviews several other biohackers who worked with Traywick on a number of products, including a vaccine for HIV and a cure for herpes. She at once details the events leading up to Traywick's death, while also seriously considering the ethical and scientific concerns the biohackers grapple with. At times gossipy and salacious, at other times moody and paranoid, Dolman neatly captures the mindset of the outsider scientists, making this a visceral viewing experience. **—Nina Li Coomes** *95 min. Showtime*

RR *The Dark and the Wicked*

The Dark and the Wicked is a relentless ride through the stages of grief and guilt. Depicting a lived-in fear through the lens of family obligation, it offers zero minutes of respite. On a secluded farm in a rural every town, Louise (Marin Ireland) and Michael's (Michael Abbott Jr.) father (Michael Zagst) has fallen ill. Despite their mother's (Julie Oliver-Touchstone) protests, the estranged siblings arrive to offer final comforts. But it quickly becomes apparent that something sinister has taken hold of their parents. Full of waking nightmares made to send a chill up viewers' spines, the more mundane moments also elicit a genuine fear, and it's one that feels familiar. The familial tension lying just below the surface, threatening to come to a head, anchors Bryan Bertino's film in an eerie and absorbing reality that serves as the perfect stage for the more shocking scares, especially the horrifying ending. **—Becca James** *95 min. Music Box Theatre*

Fire Will Come

The son of Galician immigrants, Paris-born director Oliver Laxe returns to ancestral land for his lethargic third feature. This was shot on 16-millimeter by Mauro Herce, who also shot Laxe's *Mimosas* (2016); the results are similarly ravishing, but the film is so enveloped in its aesthetic splendor that not much else resonates. The story centers on Amador (Amador Arias, a non-professional actor like the rest of the cast) after he's released from prison for serving two years for arson. He goes back to his mother's home in a small Galician village, where the diffident ex-con helps her with the cattle and attempts, ever minutely, to reintegrate himself back into daily life. One stunning scene finds Amador and the local vet, whom he possibly has romantic feelings toward, riding in her truck and listening to Leonard Cohen's "Suzanne," the song as out of place but still as beautifully fitting as Cohen's songs were in Robert Altman's *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971). After Amador realizes the vet's been told about his past infraction, things take a turn. Another mountain catches fire, and the events add a meager sense of drama to the otherwise slight proceedings, as the townspeople (and, by extension, the viewers) wonder if it was Amador who started it. To Laxe's credit, this development isn't wrought for suspense, but rather for a straightforward examination of the villagers' lingering hostility. Amador's plight—experienced also by his mother, Benedicta (Benedicta Sánchez)—is heartbreaking; both their faces tell a story, even as the film itself holds back. Ultimately, it feels as if the title is a broken promise. Fire does come, yet the film is never aflame with much more than the beauty of the Galician mountainsides and the inferno that engulfs them. In Spanish and Galician with subtitles. **—Kathleen Sachs** *85 min. Gene Siskel Film Center From Your Sofa*

RR *Francisca*

This 1981 masterwork from Portuguese writer-director Manoel de Oliveira—his sixth feature in a career that spanned from 1931 to his death in 2015—was reportedly written over a week after another project fell through. Based on a then-recently published novel by Agustina Bessa-Luís (who would go on to collaborate with Oliveira many times), the film has as one of its central characters the novelist Camilo Castelo Branco, whose book, *Doomed Love*, Oliveira adapted a few years prior. Set in 19th-century Portugal, the story follows the tumultuous relationship between Castelo Branco's friend, the aristocratic José Augusto, and the title character; the former sets his sights upon the English maiden after he learns of Castelo Branco's affection for her. (All these people existed in real life—incidentally, Oliveira's wife was a distant relative of Francisca and as a result had access to some of her letters.) José Augusto and Francisca elope, but their union is an unhappy one; fueled by jealousy and obsession, Augusto punishes Fanny up until her death from tuberculosis. The film is a provocative blend of classical and modernist modes of filmmaking. Its sets and costumes are as lush as one would expect from a film detailing this kind of passionate, historical romance, but the actors deliver their lines staidly, often looking directly into the camera as they sit or stand unmoving in painterly tableaux. Imagine something like Visconti's *The Leopard* or *Senso* with acting out of a Straub-Huillet or Marguerite Duras film. Random title cards situate the minimally presented drama—the film hangs in the balance between the inherent artifice of literature and cinema and the tangible constitution of history and life. **—Kathleen Sachs** *166 min. Gene Siskel Film Center From Your Sofa*

Rebecca

Apparently someone, somewhere, thought it wise to again adapt Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, as if the masterful 1940 film version, directed by no less than Alfred Hitchcock (with extensive oversight from producer David O. Selznick), wouldn't hang over it like Rebecca herself does over the second, purportedly lesser Mrs. de Winter. There's no inkling that this was directed by Ben Wheatley, whose films (*Kill List*, *High-Rise*), for better or worse, exhibit a distinct sense of style; I'm shocked he didn't—or perhaps wasn't able to—explore the perverse class dynamics of the source material, considering many of his films deal in just that. The casting of Lily James as the current, otherwise nameless Mrs. de Winter and Armie Hammer as Maxim de Winter is laughable, though I'm reluctant to fault them for not measuring up to Joan Fontaine and Laurence Olivier, respectively. One can, however, fault them for indulging their respective weaknesses: her, gaping disorientation, and him, doltish nescience. The realization of Manderley, arguably among the story's most important characters, is similarly underwhelming; it registers solely as the big-budget, digitally manipulated set it is, rather than as one of literature's iconic locales. Perhaps most offensively, the script, by Jane Goldman, Joe Shrapnel, and Anna Waterhouse, degradates the exquisite consternation of du Maurier's classic novel, smoothing out the refined intricacy that gives the story its ghostly expansiveness. The only good thing about this needless adaptation is Kristin Scott Thomas's performance as Mrs. Danvers; with nothing else to commend about the film, I'll give her even more credit for likely having little to play off. **—Kathleen Sachs** *PG-13, 121 min. Netflix*

RR *Smooth Talk*

Based on Joyce Carol Oates's 1966 short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?," this 1985 debut narrative feature by Joyce Chopra (*Joyce at 34*, *The Lemon Sisters*), scripted by her husband Tom Cole, retains the palpitant trepidation of Oates's text to an unnerving degree. Laura Dern, in her first lead film role, stars as Connie, a 15-year-old on summer break from school. In the film's first half, Connie and her friends hang out at the mall, go to the movies, and try to meet older guys, the excitement of sex and romance looming on the horizon of adulthood. Meanwhile, Connie is at odds with her family: her beleaguered mother, played by Mary Kay Place, is particularly inimical, while her father (Levon Helm) and twentysomething sister (Elizabeth Berridge) are unsure how to relate to her. The latter half of the film is devoted to the action that comprises most of Oates's story; a menacing older man named Arnold Friend (Treat Williams) shows up at Connie's house uninvited and coerces her into going on a drive with him. This passage is wholly terrifying, largely due to its distinct tonal shift from the first part of the film and the almost gothic sensibility it exudes as Arnold intimidates Connie into complying. Cole's script is incisive—what's not culled directly from the source material is nevertheless attuned to it, and the film feels literary as a result. Chopra's direction is adroit, completely in step with the mysterious subtleties of both Oates's story and adolescence. To that end, teenaged Dern is incredible, all long limbs and uncertainty. James Glennon's cinematography evokes the feel of a *Sweet Valley High* cover against the rural Northern California setting; James Taylor was the film's music director, and his songs here serve to reinforce the perception of innocence before and after it's corrupted. **—Kathleen Sachs** *92 min. Music Box Theatre Virtual Cinema*

Triggered

Triggered's premise is stronger than its execution. The film follows nine high school friends reuniting on a camping trip in the woods for a raucous night of reminiscing. However, the group cannot keep the fun alive for long and soon wake up with suicide bombs locked on their chests. Each one has a different time on its countdown clock, all of which promise a gory and deadly explosion. But before hope is lost, they discover they can steal time by killing each other. Bolstered by a sense of survival, the group's most ruthless come out swinging. Meanwhile, the more docile hope for a safer resolution, retreating further into the woods. Each kill reveals a different dark secret related to a former friend's untimely death in high school. Fortunately for the viewers, none of these tropes-as-people are especially likable, leaving ample room to enjoy the high-intensity thrill ride at a base level. **—Becca James** *90 min. In wide release on VOD*

Ibrahem Hasan of Bless the Mad circa 1998, digging through vinyl at Hyde Park Records
COURTESY BLESS THE MAD

Bless the Mad share their private pantheon of Black Chicago music

The production duo discuss the classic hip-hop, soul, gospel, and jazz records that inspired the reverent sonic collage on their debut album.

By Leor Galil

I regularly search Bandcamp for Chicago releases, and this past August I found the album *Bless the Mad*. At that point it was still a month from release, with only a few tracks streaming, and the information on the Bandcamp page didn't enlighten me much—just the identities of the core members of the group behind the music, also called Bless the Mad, plus a little backstory and a detailed breakdown of the guest players on each track. Unfortunately, I didn't recognize a single name.

I could draw some conclusions from the album's artwork, which collages together images from the world of Black Chicago music—including the logo for Kelan Phil Cohran's Artistic Heritage Ensemble and a photo of postman with a guitar in front of a sign for the Maxwell Street market. It gives *Bless the Mad* the look of enigmatic private-press LP, the kind that crate diggers dream of finding at estate sales or flea markets. The cover makes it clear that these artists love and respect the history of postwar Black music, and the fraction of the album I could hear this summer felt like a similar collage—a richly textured, organic collage with a hip-hop kick.

That first impression turned out to be right on the money. *Bless the Mad* incorporates gospel, soul, spiritual jazz, R&B, funk, and hip-hop, and the collective of musicians enlisted for the album play with an almost serene cool that allows them to pivot between styles without disrupting their flow. On "Fall Dead," for example, solemn but jazzy bowed double bass overlaps with strutting electric bass and a simple funk keyboard lick that tiptoes through the song; a sparse snare-drum pattern adds an invigorating hint of hip-hop that foreshadows the entrance of rapper Gaia Earthpeace. Aside from a few vocal samples, everything on *Bless the Mad* was freshly recorded by live musicians, though extensive postproduction often makes their playing sound like samples.

Fifteen people contributed to the album, though only two are members of Bless the Mad: producers and multi-instrumentalists Ibrahem Hasan and Matthew Rivera. While this is their debut under that name, they've collaborated for nearly 20 years. They've been releasing music here and there for most of that time, the majority of it since 2014 and on their own label, Stay the Course Records, but *Bless the Mad* is their first full-length album.

Hasan and Rivera aren't great with dates, but their recollections suggest that they met in their teens in the late 1990s at the Maxwell Street flea market, which by then had moved to Canal Street. By then Hasan, a Brighton Park native, had been traveling to the flea market for about six years, having been introduced to Maxwell Street by his dad. The early-bird diggers took a liking to Hasan. "I had a weird nickname: Pieces," he says. "I was the person that would come late, and then I would pull out, like, a Philip Cohran 45 and be like, 'What's this?' They'd be like, 'You fucking idiot.'"

Rivera grew up in Rogers Park and started digging for records in 1997, not long after he began DJing for parties thrown by his friends from Lane Tech—he'd pillaged his dad's collection to get started. An ex-girlfriend told him about Maxwell Street, and soon he was visiting every Sunday, waking up earlier each week to try to beat other diggers. "One day I'm like, 'Fuck it, I'm gonna get there really early.' Got there at 6:30, and there's like nine dudes, mid-dig," Rivera says. "Ibrahem was there, with a bunch of other dudes—I thought they were a crew."

Hasan, Rivera, and a couple other collectors got to talking and discovered they all made hip-hop instrumentals at home. One weekend a music producer, DJ, and fellow collector named Djuan, who'd sell records to Maxwell Street regulars out of his trunk after the flea market got picked clean, invited the aspiring beat makers to bring in their music for a listening session using his car stereo. After hearing each other's work, Hasan and Rivera realized they clicked as musicians, not just as people. Hasan invited Rivera to jam in his parents' basement in south suburban Hickory Hills, and despite the distance between their homes, Rivera made the trip.

They've continued to collaborate even as that distance has grown. Hasan, who now works as a freelance creative director in Brooklyn, first moved out of Chicago in 2001 and hasn't lived here in more than a decade. Rivera has moved around a lot too, and in March he went to Japan to teach English. They haven't lived in the same place since the late 2000s—Rivera joined Hasan in New York in 2008, after Hasan sent him a remix of material they'd recorded together, and then Hasan moved to Portland, Oregon, in 2010 for work. They made most of *Bless the Mad* over the past couple years in Hasan's home studio, working piecemeal whenever Rivera could visit. The two of them contributed mostly percussion and keyboards to the skeletons of their productions, roping in friends they'd made in New York to flesh them out fully.

Since *Bless the Mad* so clearly builds on and pays homage to our city's music history, I decided to ask Hasan and Rivera about six Chicago albums that inspired their work on the album. Most of the records they chose date from the 1970s or earlier, but they've all been reissued—in many cases recently enough that copies are still on the market. Pastor T.L. Barrett & the Youth for Christ Choir's *Like a Ship . . . (Without a Sail)*, for instance, has been reissued five times in the past decade (longtime *Reader* music critic Peter Margasak

wrote liner notes for the 2010 Light in the Attic version). They're all on Spotify too, but I highly recommend buying physical copies if possible—not just because Spotify sucks but also because record stores don't. Most local shops have continued to operate during the pandemic, and many have found novel ways to stay in business while keeping employees and customers safe. Considering the current surge of COVID cases, you should probably call ahead to ask your favorite shop about any new public-health measures.

I interviewed Hasan and Rivera separately, after they talked amongst themselves to settle on the six albums they wanted to discuss. I've edited both of their conversations for length and clarity.

EARTH, WIND & FIRE, *EARTH, WIND & FIRE* (1971)

IBRAHEM HASAN When I saw that cover I was like, "Yo, I've never seen this one before." Then when I brought it home, it just sounded a bit more raw—it had this very raw feeling. Because I'm a designer, the art also has a big influence in how I look at all these records.

MATTHEW RIVERA I guess I probably knew who Earth, Wind & Fire was, but I wasn't a fan of Earth, Wind & Fire until I heard this record.

HASAN That record was the 70s revolt sound. I don't know what it was about that record for me that it just hit that way.

RIVERA Every track is a heater—it's so dope.

HASAN The songs that stood out were "Fan the Fire"—the vocal structure in that was amazing. "This World Today," I remember listening to that and feeling like RZA made this. It sounded like hip-hop to me, but soulful with a punch.

RIVERA Maurice White was part of the Pharaohs—that connection to the Chicago underground jazz scene. It's like soul-jazz, and the musicians are killer. The vocal arrangements are killer. It's like a bridge between the Pharaohs and more mainstream soul, but it has that really deep undercurrent.

HASAN It's funny, [this album] was not a direct influence, but I think it was the overall sound—the structure, the vocal structure. Even to this day, I still think we have so much to learn in respect to song structure—just the song arrangements and whatnot. I think that record probably was helping, and the vocal chants, and how they arranged vocals, which is very new for us. We're still in the infancy of figuring that out.

RIVERA The whole vibe—the spiritual-jazz vibe, plus the really deep and soulful R&B vibe, with the rich vocal harmonization and dope bass lines. I can't say that, like, when we're making stuff, we're thinking of specific records, but I think we've absorbed it.

COMMON SENSE, *RESURRECTION* (1994)

RIVERA My boy Domenichi [Morris] gave me a tape in high school. He's on the *Bless the Mad* cover, actually—a photo I took of him at my mom's house DJing. Common was one of the first tapes he let me borrow. I went home, I listened to it again and again, and it just got better and better. In Chicago, we didn't have a lot of dope hip-hop—there's very few acts that you could be proud of. So I think that was part of it too. But just, like, the beats—No I.D., his production, it was just so dope.

HASAN It's only until I landed in hip-hop where I found my favorite space, and *Resurrection* was the record that got me there. When I heard that song, "Resurrection," it was over—that's it. I was fully engaged in understanding what that song was all about. What I was doing with that song was unpacking it and trying to figure out what are the things that they are doing so I can emulate. Like, "OK, what's this DJ thing? OK, I want to be a DJ. What is this breakdancing? Oh, I'mma breakdance."

RIVERA Anything of that style—very jazz based—it draws me to it. And it's a lot of early-90s stuff. Listening to that stuff too also helps shape your ear, when you're shopping for jazz and stuff. You're like, "Oh, this George Benson is in 'I Used to Love H.E.R.'"

HASAN When I listen to *Resurrection*, the tonality is in our music. The samples are in our music, because the process of how that record is made is no different than how our record is made—except we added on top of it. So if I started out with a very beautiful soul sample, and I chopped it up a bit, and we started to play it live—this is our live version that we interpreted.

RIVERA We're production heads; that's why we're drawn to it. There was something there I wanted to take with me on the next journey—I didn't just want to abandon it completely. In my head, I was just like, "I want to make real music, but I want to have that texture. I want that SP-1200 feel." So I always was conscious of trying to play quote-unquote real music, and make sure it was almost tricking you into thinking, "Is this a sample?" Both of us would always be like, "If it sounds like a band, that's bad." It's gotta sound "produced," whatever that means.

PASTOR T.L. BARRETT & THE YOUTH FOR CHRIST CHOIR, *LIKE A SHIP . . . (WITHOUT A SAIL)* (1971)

RIVERA My boy Andrew Brearley—Meaty Ogre, Chicago producer—he was working at Hyde Park Records. I went to his house maybe one day after work or something. He had that record. So ever since I saw him with it, I had to find it. I was looking for it for so fucking long. Other dudes had several copies—for the life of me, I couldn't figure out how people were getting this record. Every time I'd see gospel records, I'm like, "OK, where's that fuckin' Barrett? I'll never find it, it's fine." And then it popped up.

HASAN Mine is a beat-up copy. Still doesn't matter—I love that record to death. I got it at Maxwell Street.

RIVERA Being tuned to hip-hop is part of it. You listen to that kind of stuff differently—going backward, after having been tuned to certain tastes, frequencies or whatever, it hits in this different way.

HASAN "Nobody Knows" is the track—I can't play that song one time and then walk away. I have to put that on repeat and listen to it over and over again. That's how it influences me.

RIVERA It's just heavy. Like the drums just hit—it sounds like what a hip-hop producer going back in time would tell them to do: "No, hit it like this." Religion is not for me, but I love gospel music. It's praising something outside of yourself.

HASAN Every gospel record, I'd have to look for this feeling, this tone, this aggressiveness, this passion. You know that they brought everything. I will say this right now—I love spiritual jazz, and I love all kinds of music. I don't think anything hits the way gospel music hits, because it's done with so much love and passion.

RIVERA The intention of gospel music is love and it's joy, and it's made for others to experience those feelings. So much of music is like, "Look how cool I am, look how good I am, look how dope my whatever is." I think there's much, much, much less of that in gospel. I think you can hear it. We would do a whole gospel album, honestly, if we could. If it made sense.

HASAN [Bless the Mad's] "Show Me the Way," that's the gospel track, even though that was influenced by another record. The tonality, the feeling, the punchiness, the way that that record was put together—"Nobody Knows," all day. Actually, that influenced every gospel track that I made moving forward—that's the type of effect it had on me.

PHILIP COHRAN & THE ARTISTIC HERITAGE ENSEMBLE, *PHILIP COHRAN & THE ARTISTIC HERITAGE ENSEMBLE* (1967)

HASAN Man, that guy. I've been in love with him and his music for the longest time. I bought a 45, and it was on Zulu [Records, Cohran's label], and I didn't know Philip Cohran. I remember playing it at home and being like, "This is cool. Maybe I can sample it," like, super fucking asshole—I didn't have the maturity to understand what I was listening to. Listened to it more and more, and it just started to grow on me in a very different way. I kind of intellectualized the 45. I was like, "OK, I need to listen to more of this." Until I listened to that track, "On the Beach." It was over. Whenever anybody asks, "What's your favorite song in the whole wide world," this might be one of my favorite songs ever, in any genre.

RIVERA Ib, he had [this record]. At the flea market we called him Pieces, because no matter what time he would get there, no matter who's looked through that box, he'll pull a piece out. I believe he pulled that out with no cover at 10 AM—like, 10 AM, it's done. Eight AM, it's done. But I remember he got there super late, and I believe he pulled that record out. I've never found any of those. The only times I've seen them were in the shop, for about $300. So that's like something I've only been fortunate enough to hear at his house.

HASAN That's a masterpiece to me. Me and

Matt Rivera of Bless the Mad (left) circa 2007 with pianist Ken Chaney of the Awakening, in Jackson Park where Chaney was teaching lessons DAVID AUJERO

Mateo [Matthew Rivera], we have this thing where there's certain records we just don't touch. We are not gonna make it better. Respect that artist. Like, I'm never gonna touch James Brown. What am I gonna do to James Brown? He's fucking James Brown!

RIVERA Part of that late-60s, early-70s jazz-funk, spiritual-jazz scene with the kalimba, the thumb piano—I know Maurice White was doing that with Earth, Wind & Fire, and Phil Cohran had a lot of that [*Ed: Cohran, who mentored White in the 1960s, devised an electrified thumb piano he called the frankiphone while playing with Sun Ra in the '50s*]. It has African elements and also, like, sort of has a worship element too. This music is very powerful, and it connects us, and it connects us to something higher.

HASAN When I listen to that song ["On the Beach"] in particular, there's never a part of me that's like, "We should do a remake of this, or a rendition of this." It's gonna influence what we do and how we create. I mean, that song influences pretty much everything on this record [*Bless the Mad*]—"Ra's Lament," "Mama's Land." It's just always in there.

RIVERA We're producers; we don't have a band. All this stuff is mostly overdubbed. A lot of times it's just me. We're not fortunate enough at this moment to turn off the lights and have this spiritual session. So that's not there. But we still want that feeling—we still want to tap into that, into what the music does or what it's capable of doing. Just like we try to capture that SP-1200, early-90s texture, we draw from spiritual jazz and gospel and try to tap into that feeling.

CURTIS MAYFIELD, *CURTIS* (1970)

RIVERA That was easy to find—back in the day, it was everywhere. You couldn't not find that record. It was everywhere, in every condition. I've had a lot of copies of that one—that record is my favorite record of all time, I think. I might just say that's number one.

HASAN Matt brought this record up, and I was like, "Damn, I haven't listened to this record in a long time." Yesterday night, I was working; I put it on, and I was like, "Oh my God, this feels so good!" It was like a breath of fresh air. It was almost like I forgot Curtis's voice. His voice is like, honestly, if he started singing to me I'd be like, "Whatever you want, you can have." His voice is so soulful and beautiful, it can turn your day; if you were having a bad day and you put *Curtis* on, it changes the whole vibe and energy of your space. When they were recording, I almost feel like the tape was oozing with honey.

RIVERA Why is it so dope? It's soul. That's the definition of soul, it just hits you. A lot of times the bass line, it just stays the same the entire time for, like, eight minutes. But he found the right one—that's it, that's the one, that's the bass line. Why change it? "We don't need a B section, that's it." That's hip-hop; that's what hip-hop is.

HASAN That record influenced one of my favorite songs on our record, "I Wanna Give to You." That one was a direct influence. Obviously, it doesn't sound like *Curtis*, but the feeling that that gave me is a very similar feeling that I felt when I listened to that *Curtis* record.

RIVERA *Curtis* is in everything. I can't do anything without him—I love Curtis Mayfield.

THE AWAKENING, *MIRAGE* (1973)

HASAN I grew up working on cars—that was the family business [Brighton Automotive], and it was in Brighton Park on the south side. I would go there as a youngster and just work. I didn't really understand who would come in and out of our mechanic's shop.

One day, I buy the Awakening's record from Maxwell Street. I get home, I put the stack of records on the table. My dad comes in and he goes, "Hey man, that's Ken!" I'm like, "What the fuck are you talking about?" Mind you, I don't know who Ken is—he's like, "Hey man, that's Ken!" And I'm like, "Man, stop fucking around, you don't know what you're talking about." So I turned the record; lo and behold, it's Ken. And I'm like, "What's his last name?" "I don't know—Chaney?" I'm like, "Jesus Christ, you know him. Oh my God." He [pianist Ken Chaney] brings his car to the shop.

I didn't know Ramsey Lewis brought his car to the shop. A lot of well-known musicians brought their cars to my dad's shop. Steve "Silk" Hurley brought his car to the shop. I had no idea that these people were coming into the shop; I had no clue. My relationship to Ken is interesting because he used to come to my dad's shop to fix his car. And then ultimately became Mateo's piano teacher.

RIVERA I was fortunate enough to learn that [Chaney] was teaching at Jackson Park. I'm like, "I really want to learn this fucking piano." I had tried it a couple times, but the teachers just didn't work. I thought I couldn't do it. I thought it was too hard. It was boring, and the teachers were boring, and they seemed disinterested. Djuan said [Chaney] is teaching at Jackson Park, and I'm like, "Let me just go down there and see what's up." I went and I paid my 30 bucks for, like, three months—Chicago Park District, thank God. And there he is, in the little room with a bunch of pianos. I had lessons with him every Friday at 3 PM for about a year.

He knew exactly what I was talking about—like, "I like this kind of music, I want to play something like this—I like Roy Ayers." He knew exactly what I was asking for. He's like, "Here, play this." He did the C major scale and all that stuff, but he let me cut through and get to the cool shit, so I could be motivated. He showed me the C minor seventh chord, which is a basic jazz chord, but it blew my fucking mind. He's like, "Here, you want this." I'm like, "Holy shit, what the fuck is this?" And it's four fingers. He's like, "Yeah, practice that." I thought I was like RZA at home—I was playing this chord again and again. He's like, "Yeah, learn it in every key." So I spent a year trying to master just that chord in every key—it was so dope. He tried to teach me other stuff too. A lot of our lessons were just talk; we didn't even play. I would just ask him questions and he'd tell me about touring and like a lot of interesting tidbits.

He's an important dude, an important figure in my life. When I found that Awakening record, I brought it into the class to have him sign it for me. I was like, "Do you know how much I paid for this record?" At the time I think I paid 70 bucks for it at Dusty Groove.

HASAN I never had a relationship with Ken, but I love the fact that we have Ken's imprint on our music.

RIVERA I like jazz-funk a lot, and [*Mirage*] hits the jazz-funk side and the spiritual-jazz side. It's so cool to hear this guy playing—I know that guy. To have him show me a couple of things that he's doing on this record, I think that makes it one of those records I'll never get rid of. Even without the connection, it's one of the best spiritual jazz-funk albums of that era, for sure. Definitely one of the best records in the Black Jazz catalog.

HASAN I think it's amazing to be able to kind of say, "Hey, Ken influenced our music. Ken was the reason why Matt plays the way he plays."

RIVERA If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't even be here.

@imLeor

MUSIC

PICK OF THE WEEK

Chicago grind-pop trio the Cell Phones deliver a much-needed jolt of life on *Battery Lower*

COURTESY OF DON'T PANIC RECORDS

THE CELL PHONES, *BATTERY LOWER*
Don't Panic
dontpanicitsadistro.bandcamp.com/album/battery-lower

CHICAGO HAS NO SHORTAGE of inventive underground bands that borrow from punk, indie rock, metal, and any other pulse-quickening style to create a deranged, idiosyncratic sound. But no one in town does it quite like the Cell Phones. This three-piece can whip up as much noise as a crash of rhinos—if rhinos had thumbs and the dexterity to pull off tight, supple melodic flourishes on guitar. Bassist Ryan Szeszycki and drummer Justin Purcell flit between burly breakdown grindcore breakdowns and grungy doo-wop with start-stop precision, while powerhouse front woman Lindsey Charles lends the band's severe sound a playful looseness with her coarse screams and honeyed coos. On their new third full-length, *Battery Lower* (Don't Panic), the Cell Phones direct their anger and frustration at trivial pop-culture nonsense and monstrous political malfeasance alike: "Untitled 3 (Ode to Eddie Brock)" takes jabs at the ham-fisted *Venom* movie, while "53 percent" eviscerates the white women who've supported Trump's patriarchal, misogynistic, and tyrannical administration. The Cell Phones capture the gathering outrage that's peaked in 2020—they go from zero to blastoff in seconds flat—but they also express love, hope, and seemingly every other emotion in a way that's downright life affirming. When your days feel bleak and long, *Battery Lower* can help you recharge to keep fighting. **—Leor Galil**

Beabadoobee CALLUM HARRISON

AUSAR, *FLIGHT OF THE HONEYBEE*
Self-released
songwhip.com/ausar/flight-of-the-honeybee-ep

Chicago rapper Ausar Bradley struck me as a whip-smart lyricist with impressive mike skills when he was still studying at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign—he was two years shy of his undergraduate degree when he dropped the excellent 2017 mixtape *The 6 Page Letter*. This year Ausar, who records and performs under his first name, has released a handful of sharp singles and his first postgraduate EP, the new *Flight of the Honeybee*. As he recently told Vocalo host Bekoe, he was still working on the EP's title track when he decided its horns reminded him of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's famous orchestral composition "Flight of the Bumblebee." After he wrote its lyrics, he decided to build an entire concept EP around bees—especially the ways they've been misunderstood, mistreated, or maligned. "The project is basically using bees in general as a metaphor for marginalized groups," he said.

Throughout the EP, Ausar incorporates this concept in different ways, rather than letting one big idea act like an anchor around his neck; his conceits always feel natural, never forced. On "Bee Sides Freestyle" he saves the apian references for a skit at the end, after a blistering, gear-shifting performance—he speeds up and slows down with a smooth, assertive flair to complement sudden shifts in his soul-sampling beat. And on the simmering "Stinger," Ausar sounds poised and relaxed under pressure—one of the reasons I think he'll grow to be as critical to Chicago's music scene as bees are to our ecosystem. **—Leor Galil**

BEABADOOBEE, *FAKE IT FLOWERS*
Dirty Hit
beabadoobee.com

British singer-songwriter Beabadoobee is only 20 years old, but on her debut album, *Fake It Flowers*, she's written songs that sound like alt-pop favorites from the decade before she was born—mostly the Sundays with a hint of Tanya Donelly. To my ears, her music's combo of sugary sweetness with a hint of bile defines the "alternative" era's pop songwriting as precisely as a flannel shirt signifies its rock fashion. Beabadoobee (born Beatrice Laus and also known as Bea Kristi) got her first break when YouTube's 1-800-LOVE-U channel shared the video for her 2017 single "Coffee," which she'd recorded in a friend's bedroom—she racked up more than 300,000 views in just days, and in 2018 she landed a contract with West London label Dirty Hit. The following year Canadian rapper Powfu sampled "Coffee" for his track "Death Bed," which went viral on TikTok. Because Bea is young and sings with a gentle lilt, some people might mistake her for demure, but her lyrics reveal a woman who doesn't have to take your bullshit. On "Worth It" she asserts, "I'm not wasting time / But you've been on my mind." The album's breakout single, "Care" (it peaked at 27 on the *Billboard* Rock Airplay chart last month), layers jangly guitar with declarations of independence that strike a similar tone: "I don't want your sympa-

Cleared COURTESY THE ARTIST

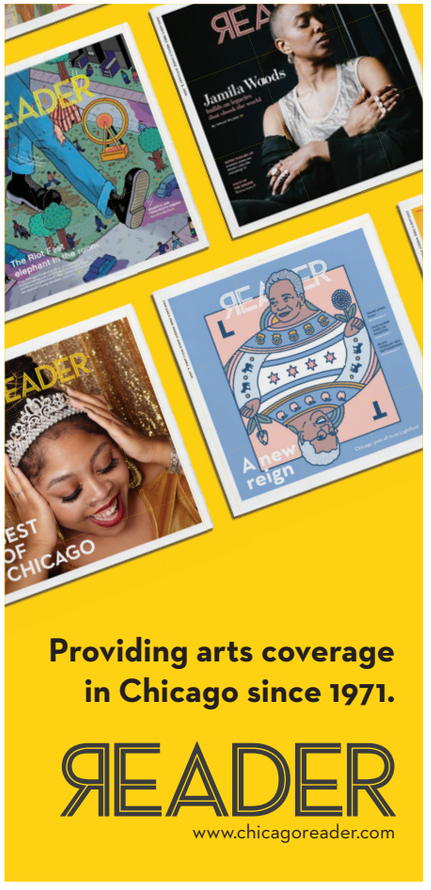
thy / Stop saying you give a shit / 'Cuz you don't really care." Despite the very 21st-century start to her career, Beabadoobee isn't merely a lucky winner in the viral-video lottery; the solid pop statements that fill *Fake It Flowers* befit the evolution of a talented songwriter. **—Salem Collo-Julin**

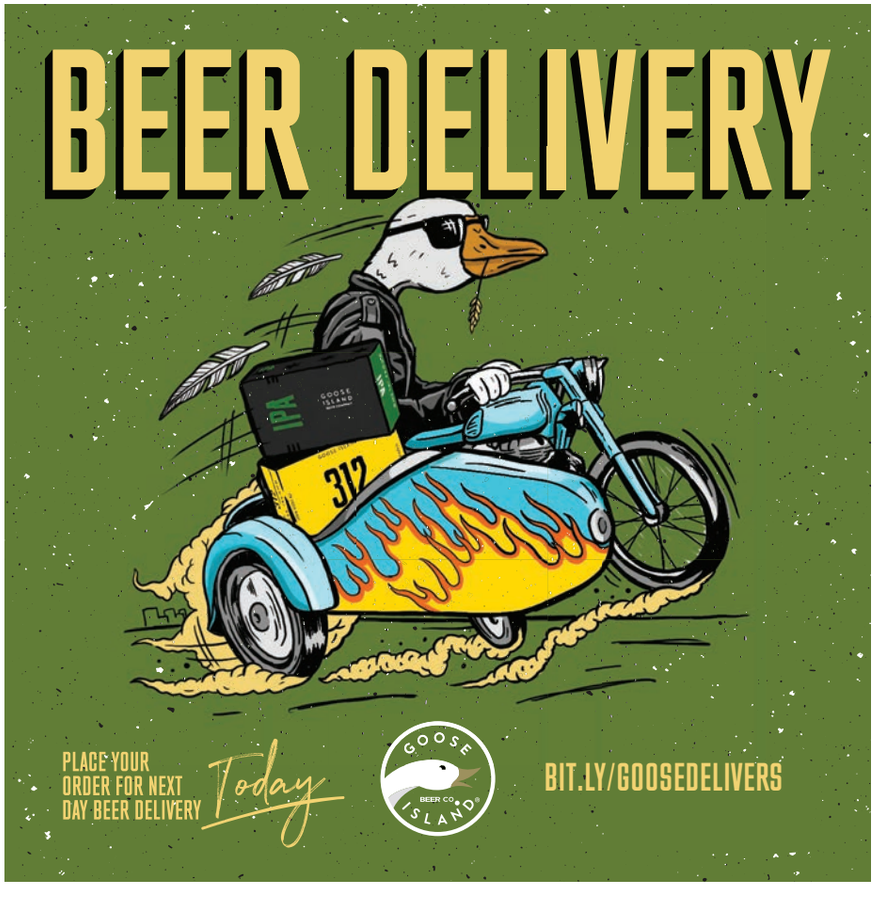
CLEARED, *THE KEY*
Touch
sundryitems.bandcamp.com/album/the-key

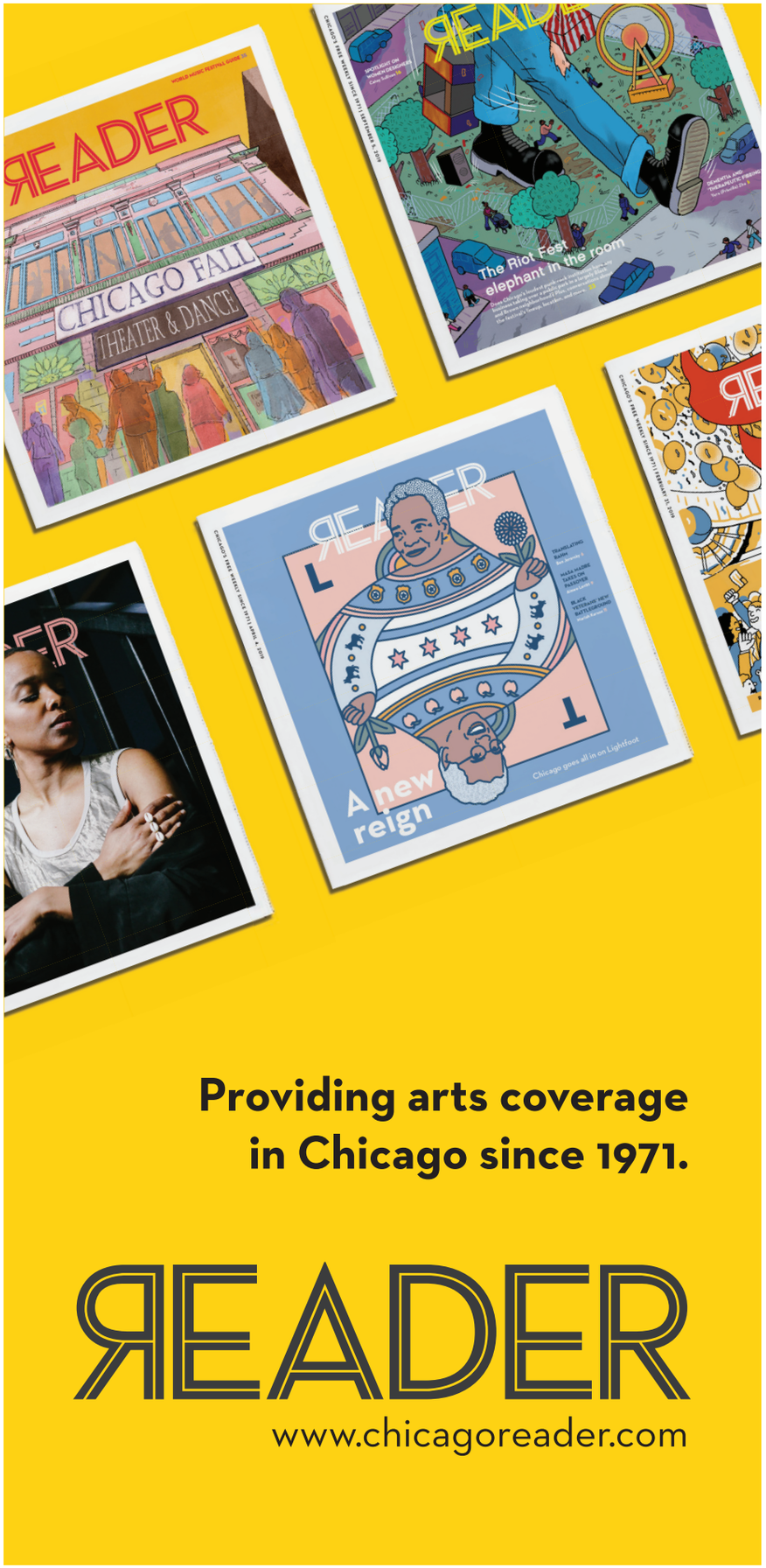
Recording studios have reputations, and Chicago's Electrical Audio is well-known as the place to go if you want to capture how your band really sounds. But when Michael Vallera and Steven Hess of local duo Cleared entered that establishment in spring 2019, they were in the early phase of a transformation. Their first four albums had navigated a linear path through stark rock structures and synthetic sounds, informed by the way those elements sounded in concert. But for their fifth, *The Key*, they started not with tunes but with written diagrams, which the two of them used to guide a series of studio improvisations. Vallera then took the raw recordings back home and spent a year extracting a finished album out of that material. During that process he not only filtered out anything that sounded like a riff or a melody but also layered and amplified individual elements until they became discrete musical entities. "Bonded" disassembles the component sounds of a drum kit and scatters them across a couple looped guitar notes that appear and reappear like the lights of passing cars flickering across a bedroom ceiling. And the 13-minute "Of Air" consists mostly of guitar resonance and a few low drumbeats stirred into field recordings of a thunderstorm. Once the work was complete, Cleared commissioned remixes of each of the album's four tracks from Fennesz, Philip Jeck, Bethan Kellough (three of their labelmates on Touch), and fellow Chicagoan Olivia Block. Some of these collaborators turned Cleared's music into mirror images of their own, while others created crystallized reductions of it—but all of them continued the process of unlocking sounds and tinkering with them at an atomic level. **—Bill Meyer**

DARK BUDDHA RISING, *MATHREYATA*
Svart
darkbuddharising.bandcamp.com

Of all the albums I've covered since the *Reader* adapted to the pandemic by trading concert previews for record reviews, the new release from Finnish metal explorers Dark Buddha Rising is probably the best one I could've picked to help me stay grounded and focused during our agonizing election week. Psych, drone, and doom are among the most immersive forms of music on earth, and on *Mathreyata*, Dark Buddha Rising alchemize them into something that feels big enough to encompass the cosmos—an especially inviting place when things get this heavy on the home planet. Since forming in 2007, Dark Buddha Rising have used improvisation and intuition to compose their celestial transmissions. Their work is founded in darkness, but their fascination with geometry, nature,







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MUSIC

James Brandon Lewis COURTESY OF AKAMU

and the esoteric gives even their most diabolical experiments a meditative quality: on *Mathreyata* lead track "Sunyaga," for instance, doomy guitars and unfaltering drums create an almost serene pulsing drone beneath the windswept screams of front man Vesa Ajomo, before the song drops into a blackened abyss. Dark Buddha Rising recorded the base of the album's four long pieces before joining forces with fellow Finnish extreme-metal group Oranssi Pazuzu for the 2019 debut album of their collaborative Waste of Space Orchestra. Only when that project was done did they return to this material, and the stretched-out process seems to have suited them: *Mathreyata* contains some of their most powerful music to date. The prismatic layers of the instrumental "Uni" are a great way to get lost, and sprawling album closer "Mahatgata III" ends this journey on a peak: its psychedelic twists, intense builds, and cathartic releases can help you feel ready to face any storm. **—Jamie Ludwig**

JAMES BRANDON LEWIS QUARTET, *MOLECULAR*

Intakt

jamesbrandonlewis.bandcamp.com/album/molecular

On his new album, *Molecular*, Brooklyn saxophonist James Brandon Lewis showcases a vision that's both microscopic and immense. In the liner notes he describes a compositional model that draws inspiration from the structural components of DNA, comparing the shape of the music to a double helix: "Within a single melodic line emerges a counter line of varied rhythms, pitches, and harmony," he writes. That image also references the way Lewis's compositions weave together a world of disparate sources. The members of his quartet thrive on such contrasts, and on *Molecular* they intertwine feelings of mystery and joy. On the title track, changing tempos create constant surprises; Lewis and pianist Aruán Ortiz complement each other while also conveying different senses of time. Likewise, on "Cesaire," Lewis layers a heavy tone atop keyboard runs from Ortiz that seem lighter and higher in register. Lewis's designs also provide for open spaces that are key to the quartet's constantly shifting emphases, such as the pairing of bassist Brad Jones and drummer Chad Taylor as lead voices on part of "Helix." Brief forays into spontaneous composition ("Per 1" and "Per 2") serve as punctuation to this song cycle. Lewis's tenor style often nods toward classic swing and spirituals, especially on the closing ballad, "Loverly." He's delved into this territory before; his other 2020 album, *Live in Willisau* (a duet with Taylor), includes a reworking of Duke Ellington's "Come Sunday." But on *Molecular* his group assemble all these inspirational elements into something entirely original. **—Aaron Cohen**

MACABRE, *CARNIVAL OF KILLERS*

Nuclear Blast

murdermetal.bandcamp.com/album/carnival-of-killers

Carnival of Killers, the first album by south-side heavy-music pioneers Macabre in nearly a decade, is pretty much exactly what I hoped it would be. The trio, who haven't had a lineup change since forming in 1985, have built a global following with what they call "murder metal"—that is, songs about serial killers and other heinous criminals. For all their morbid subject matter, Macabre also provide welcome reassurance: even in these troubled times; you can count on them to create a solid product. That said, they aren't one-trick ponies, and *Carnival of Killers* is a reminder of that—their songs stick to a narrow theme, but they have a diverse emotional range. "Your Window Is Open," about Richard Ramirez, amplifies a churning sense of visceral threat into full-on terror by vividly evoking the fear of the killer's victims. It stands in stark contrast to "Them Dry Bones," about H.H. Holmes, whose corny charm takes cues from the old song about which bone is connected to which other bone (it's both a nursery rhyme and a gospel number). The chorus has been stuck in my head for a week: "Dem bones dem bones / You can buy bones / Dem bones dem bones / From Doctor Holmes." Macabre are so committed to their craft that they switch to German for "Warte, Warte," about Fritz Haarmann. Then two tracks later they're back to trafficking in the musical whiplash that's an

Macabre MICHELLE MARGAUX

important part of the modus operandi on *Carnival of Killers*: "The Wheels on the Bug" works another familiar kids' tune into a song about Ted Bundy. Fascination with murderers' power can go hand in hand with empathy for their victims, and artists can simultaneously critique and celebrate the oversize role the serial killer plays in pop culture. It's tempting to deny humanity's very worst impulses, but lying to ourselves rarely helps anything—and this album actually makes it fun to confront the truth. For the past 22 years, Macabre have anchored a spectacular and cathartic annual festival called Holiday of Horror (lately at Reggies' Rock Club), but they're skipping 2020 due to COVID-19. Given the way the pandemic is trending, large family gatherings—the kind you might need to fantasize about killing your way out of—are off the table too. At least there's new Macabre music to listen to while you beat your head against the wall. **—Monica Kendrick**

EMMA RUTH RUNDLE & THOU, *MAY OUR CHAMBERS BE FULL*

Sacred Bones
sacredbonesrecords.com/products/sba007-emma-ruth-rundle-thou-may-our-chambers-be-full

Sacred Bones has been the label home for some of the most hallowed collaborations in heavy music, such as the Body and Uniform's enduring alliance and the soul-stirring Marissa Nadler and Stephen Brodsky duo outing *Droneflower*. Baton Rouge upstarts Thou and singer-songwriter Emma Ruth Rundle become the latest artists in that tradition with the sludgy requiems of this month's *May Our Chambers Be Full*. After joining forces for a powerful collaborative set (and a slew of Misfits covers) at the 2019 edition of influential Dutch festival Roadburn, the artists have taken their tumult to tape for a seven-track album that barely scrapes the 40-minute mark, packing every song with the utmost intensity. It often crosses the lines between drone, sludge, and 90s alt-rock—but it also taps into more familiar and comfortable sounds. "Monolith" channels early Queens of the Stone Age, while "Ancestral Recall" could easily slip into Rundle's increasingly bleak and crushing solo catalog. *May Our Chambers Be Full* foregrounds each partner's strengths: Thou unleash grungy muck while Rundle refracts heaviness through the prism of her gauzy vocals. While the album is indisputably a group endeavor, Rundle leads triumphant album closer "The Valley"—Thou vocalist Bryan Funck joins in to end the nine-minute song with a climactic yowling demand to move a pyre of bodies "out of my way." The chambers are indeed full, and they can barely contain the demons that Rundle and Thou exorcise together. **—Shannon Nico Shreibak**

LUKE TITUS, *PLASMA*

Sooper
sooperrecords.com/products/676647-plasma

Luke Sangerman, who performs and records as Luke Titus, is 24 years old but has the skill set and intuition of a seasoned veteran. He's had a long music career for someone his age: He joined the Blue Man Group as a stage-band drummer at age 15, becoming the youngest American ever hired by the international performance-art ensemble. And for a decade now he's been a key player in the young Chicago scene where pop, hip-hop, and rock overlap. He played in sorely short-lived fusion soul band Woo Park (which also featured in-demand guitarist Brian Sanborn), and he's collaborated with Noname, Phoelix, and Ravyn Lenae. I've almost always seen Titus behind the kit onstage, and his freakishly precise drumming commands attention even when he's supporting a star. But his ambitions extend far beyond percussion. On his new debut album as Luke Titus, *Plasma* (Sooper), he's a one-man band, packing kinetic frisson into stylistically freewheeling pop songs. He jumbles together clattering percussion, limber guitars, and robust synths that evoke classic funk records; sometimes he plays every instrument at white-knuckle speed, and just as often he leans slowly into a sumptuous R&B melody. Lenae, Quari, and Elton Aura add guest vocals to *Plasma*, but Titus mostly handles the mike himself. On top of everything else he can do, he's a strong singer with an intense falsetto and star power to match—and who knows what other gifts he has yet to show off. **—Leor Galil**

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773-769-9299 | womenandchildrenfirst.com

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POETRY FOUNDATION

Poetry Foundation | 61 West Superior Street | poetryfoundation.org

Wednesday, December 2 | Virtual Event | 7pm

Combating White Supremacy in America

This season on *Motive*, podcast host Odette Yousef explored the origins of the youth white supremacist movement in America.

Join WBEZ as we speak to experts in the field about how other countries are countering white supremacist ideology; and what effective tools and practices the U.S. might adopt.

Throughout the event viewers will have an opportunity to ask questions about the podcast as well as share their opinions on what the U.S. should do to combat white supremacy.

Register for the event: WBEZ.org/Events

Listen to the podcast: WBEZ.org/Motive

The Chicago Reader BOOK CLUB

Mikki Kendall
Hood Feminism: Notes From the Women That a Movement Forgot
Book Club Month:
October 20
Author Talk:
10/22/2020

Sonali Dev
Recipe for Persuasion
November 20
11/19/2020

Riva Lehrer
Golem Girl
December 20
12/17/2020

Emil Ferris
My Favorite Thing Is Monsters
January 21
1/28/2021

Eve Ewing
1919
February 21
2/25/2021

Nnedi Okorafor
Remote Control
March 21
3/25/2021

Natalie Moore
The South Side
April 21
4/22/2021

Rebecca Makkai
The Great Believers
May 21
5/27/2021

Fatimah Asghar
If They Come for Us
June 21
6/24/2021

Kayla Ancrum
Darling
July 21
7/22/2021

Jessica Hopper
(TBD)
August 21
8/26/2021

Precious Brady-Davis
I Have Always Been Me: A Memoir
September 21
9/23/2021

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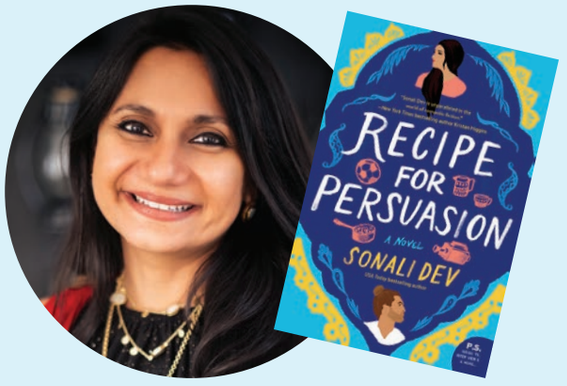
Sonali Dev *with moderator Brianna Wellen*



USA Today bestselling author Sonali Dev writes Bollywood-style love stories that explore issues faced by women around the world. Dev's novels have been on *Library Journal*, NPR, *Washington Post*, and *Kirkus's* best books of the year lists. She has won the American Library Association's award for best romance, the RT Reviewer Choice Award for best contemporary romance, multiple RT Seals of Excellence, is a RITA finalist, and has been listed for the Dublin Literary Award. Shelf Awareness calls her "Not only one of the best but one of the bravest romance novelists working today." She lives in Chicagoland with her husband, two visiting adult children, and the world's most perfect dog.
Find more at sonalidev.com.

Book Club Month: Nov. 20 **Author Talk:** *11/19/2020*

Riva Lehrer *with moderator Heidi Stevens*

Riva Lehrer is an artist, writer, and curator whose work focuses on issues of physical identity and the socially challenged body. She is best known for representations of people with impairments, and those whose sexuality or gender identity have long been stigmatized. A longtime faculty member of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Riva is currently an instructor in medical humanities at Northwestern University.

Book Club Month: Dec. 20 **Author Talk:** *12/17/2020*

EARLY WARNINGS

CHICAGO SHOWS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IN THE WEEKS TO COME

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NEW

A2B2 Night of Fire featuring Andy Morin, Laura Les (100 Gecs), Dorian Electra, Xiu Xiu, Ariel Pink, Machine Girl, RP Boo, Sewerslvt, Liturgy, Daedelus, Lustsickpuppy, Cold Deck, Nixtrove, Alice Gas, DJ Chad, Kill Alters, Wharfwhit, Umru, and more 11/13, 10 PM, livestream at twitch.tv/a2b2website FREE

Architects 11/21, noon, livestream at architects.veeps.com ALL

Atreyu 11/20, 8 PM; 12/4, 8 PM, livestream at atreyumerch.com ALL

Jenny Bienemann's Haiku Milieu 11/20, 7:30 PM, livestream at fitzgeraldsnightclub.com FREE ALL

Billingsley & Earp 11/21, 7 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE ALL

Boy Band Night 11/21, 7 PM, 115 Bourbon Street, Merrionette Park FREE

Hollis Brown (Velvet Underground tribute) 11/15, 6 PM, livestream at citywinery.com ALL

David Broza and friends 12/23, 7 PM, livestream at citywinery.com ALL

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center 12/17, 7:30 PM, livestream at harristheaterchicago.org ALL

Chicago Honky Tonk DJs 11/22, 3 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE ALL

Isaiah Collier & the Chosen Few 12/17-12/19, 7 and 9 PM; 12/20, 4 and 8 PM, Jazz Showcase ALL

Denzel Curry 11/18, 8 PM, livestream at momenthouse.com ALL

Tomer Damsky, Eval Bitton & Ofer Tisser 11/16, 6 PM, livestream at ess.org FREE ALL

Anthony David 12/26, 6 PM, livestream at citywinery.com ALL

John Doe Folk Trio 11/19, 8 PM, livestream at mandolin.com ALL

John Doe Live From Arlyn Studios 12/16, 8 PM, livestream at mandolin.com ALL

John Doe (solo) 1/20/2021, 8 PM, livestream at mandolin.com ALL

FitzGerald's 12 Streams of Christmas presents Song for Song: Jon Langford & Bonnie "Prince" Billy 12/2, 8 PM, livestream at fitzgeraldsnightclub.com FREE ALL

Rajiv Halim Quintet 12/10-12/12, 7 and 9 PM; 12/13, 4 and 8 PM, Jazz Showcase ALL

Justin Hayward, Mike Dawes 5/23/2021-5/24/2021, 8 PM, City Winery ALL

Hold Steady 12/3-12/4, 8 PM; 12/5, 4 PM, livestream at stream.fans.live ALL

Homeroom presents Blank Box featuring sound by Hunter Diamond & Paul Giallorenzo 11/21, 8 PM, livestream at elasticarts.org FREE ALL

Hoyle Brothers 11/22, 1 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE ALL

Illiterate Light & Devon Gilfillian 11/13, 8 PM, livestream at stream.fans.live ALL

Peter Joly Group 11/21, 4 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE ALL

Journeyman: A Tribute to Eric Clapton with Shaun Hague 6/25/2021, 8 PM, City Winery ALL

Wynonna Judd 11/13, 6:30 PM, livestream at citywinery.com ALL

Julian Lage & Margaret Glaspy 11/11, 7 PM, livestream at citywinery.com ALL

Jon Langford 11/24, 7 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE ALL

Lsdream presents Lightcode Meditation Livestream 11/16, 9 PM, livestream at youtube.com/c/LSDREAM/featured FREE ALL

Lu's Jukebox with Lucinda Williams, episode six 12/31, 7 PM, livestream at mandolin.com ALL

Lera Lynn 11/17, 7 PM, livestream at citywinery.com ALL

M. Ward album-release show 12/11, 8 PM, livestream at go.seated.com ALL

James Maddock and friends 11/20, 7:30 PM, livestream at citywinery.com ALL

Michael McDermott album-release show for *What in the World* 5/14/2021, 8 PM, City Winery ALL

Metallica's Helping Hands Concert and Auction 11/14, 4 PM, livestream at metallica.com/awmh ALL

Diana Mosquera 11/19, 7 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE ALL

Nella 4/28/2021, 8 PM, City Winery ALL

Neptune's Core 11/21, 1 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE ALL

DJ Quiana Parks and guests 11/15, noon, livestream at twitch.tv/moveforwardmusic FREE ALL

Dolly Parton: Holiday Songs 11/13, noon, livestream at twitch.tv/amazonmusic FREE ALL

Place of Assembly presents Micah Silver 11/23, 6 PM, livestream at ess.org FREE

Rookie 11/25, 7 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE ALL

Walter Salas-Humara 11/12, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com/hideout ALL

DJ Sonic Marchesa 11/11, 8 PM, livestream at twitch.tv/latebarchicago FREE ALL

Sounds of India featuring Pandit Rupak Kulkarni, Pandit Hindole Majumdar & Paul Westfahl, and more 11/22, 10 AM, livestream hosted by the Hindole Majumdar School of Music and Dance, access provided after ticket purchase ALL

Spektral Quartet presents A Very Virtual Rehearsal featuring Gene Knific 11/13, 3 PM, livestream at spektralquartet.com FREE

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Taiko Legacy 17 featuring Tsukasa Taiko 12/20, livestream at ess.org FREE ALL

Texas Gentlemen 4/23/2021, 8 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn

Paul Thorn 4/21/2021, 8 PM, City Winery ALL

311 perform *Music* 11/11, 7 PM, livestream at 311streamsystem.com ALL

Tone Glow presents Still House Plants, Wendy Eisenberg, Lucy Liyou, Sunik Kim 11/14, 2 PM, livestream at ess.org FREE ALL

Molly Tuttle, Carl Anderson 8/22/2021, 7 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music ALL

Verzuz presents Jeezy vs. T.I. 11/19, 7 PM, livestream at instagram.com/verzuztv FREE ALL

Virtual Planet Earth with DJ Dave Roberts 11/14, 9 PM, livestream at twitch.tv/latebarchicago FREE ALL

Virtual Soundwalks in Chicago featuring work by Norman W. Long & Sara Zalek, J.L. Simonson & Katie Wood, Veronica Salina & Chloe Lin, Andy Slater, Eric Leonardson 11/14, 5 PM, livestream presented by the Midwest Society for Acoustic Ecology FREE

Wild Feathers 11/20, 8 PM, livestream at stream.fans.live ALL

Oliver Wood and friends 11/21, 8 PM, livestream at citywinery.com ALL

UPDATED

Sebastian Bach, Stitched Up Heart 6/9/2021, 7:30 PM, Joe's Live, Rosemont, rescheduled

Marshall Crenshaw & the Bottle Rockets 10/21/2021, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled ALL

Rodney Crowell 5/4/2021, 8 PM, City Winery, rescheduled ALL

Djent Fest featuring Tanzen, Frequencies, Psithurism, Immortalis, Speaking With Ghosts, Dead/Awake, Hive 8/15/2021, 6 PM, Beat Kitchen, postponed, 17+

Dreary North Fest featuring Bastard Noise, Water Torture, Midwestlust, Sea of Shit, Reaper, Deathrun, Knifedoutofexistence, Surfer James, Citizen 213, Bullshit Market, Bobxlazar, Pat Peltier, Dipt, Sarin, Rush ➡

WOLF BY KEITH HERZIK

GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

GOSSIP WOLF HAS never bought into the theory that punk gets better when it has a bigoted, incompetent Republican administration to rail against. (And Americans certainly didn't consider that when they flushed the current one!) But in case you feel like cherry-picking supporting evidence, Chicago hardcore band **Wrong War** provided some on Election Day in the form of their anvil-heavy debut LP, ***Fixed Against Forever***. The veteran crew—former Ottawa and Current singer **Matt Weeks**, guitarist **Patrick Keenan**, bassist **Dave Pawlowski**, and drummer **Dan Smith**—retch up a projectile of feral, rumbling riffs that delivers a hearty "fuck you" to the Trump era. The video for "First Shot Misses" uses footage from Dan Dinello and Tom Corboy's film *Pink Triangles Rising* that shows the LGBTQ+ community confronting a neo-Nazi rally intended to disrupt the 1982 Chicago Pride Parade; it was directed by Dinello's son Bryan.

Gossip Wolf recently got hip to **Jonn Wallen**, who makes synth-based experimental music as **Oui Ennui**. In October, he and Chicago multi-instrumentalist and bandleader **Angel Bat Dawid** teamed up as **Daoui** to release the full-length collaboration ***Message From the Daoui***. And last Friday, Oui Ennui dropped ***(Nos)+Algebra***, a serene ambient solo EP made by digitally processing cassette recordings of synth loops and then subjecting them to cassette-tape delay. Standout track "1063 Prospect Blvd." ends with what sounds like a symphony's worth of strings playing from the bottom of a well.

The *Reader* last checked in on **Jamal Moss**, aka **Hieroglyphic Being**, shortly after he dropped *The Pleiadian Agenda* in July—at that point he'd put out a dozen progressive-house full-lengths since March, and since then he's added ten more releases to the stack! This wolf recommends browsing his Bandcamp page starting with the latest, the crunchy ***4 the Ones Who Know***, and working backward. **—J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

EARLY WARNINGS

Falknor, Dental Work, Shrivel Up, and more 5/29/2021, 2 PM, Subterranean, postponed
Elder, Bask, Flesh of the Stars 11/28, 7 PM, Reggies' Rock Club, postponed, 17+
Lucy Kaplansky 11/19/2021, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, rescheduled
Josh Kelley 4/10/2021, 8 PM, City Winery, rescheduled
Little River Band, John Ford Coley 1/28/2021, 7:30 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan, rescheduled; tickets purchased for original and previously rescheduled dates will be honored
Lost Dog Street Band 6/5/2021, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, rescheduled; tickets purchased for original and previously rescheduled dates will be honored, 18+
Michael McDermott 12/16-12/17, 7:30 PM; 12/18-12/20, 8 PM, City Winery, 12/18-12/20 sold out
Steve Poltz 12/1/2021, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled

UPCOMING

Dee Alexander Quartet with Miguel de la Cerna, Junius Paul, and Ernie Adams 11/26-11/28, 7 and 9 PM; 11/29, 4 and 8 PM, Jazz Showcase
Alyssa Allgood/Lenard Simpson/Pete Benson/John Tate/Neil Hemphill 11/18, 8 PM, livestream at youtube.com/fultonstreetcollective FREE
Michael Brown 12/4, 7 PM, livestream at tickets.uchicago.edu
CCTV: Club Chicago Television 11/13, 6 PM; 11/20, 6 PM, livestream at reunionchicago.com FREE
Circa Survive, Gouge Away 1/16/2021, 6:30 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+
Shawn Colvin, Daphne Willis 1/23/2021-1/24/2021, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
CSO Sessions Episode 4: Mozart, Shaw, & Brahms Viewable through 11/20, livestream at cso.org
Deeper 11/18, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com/hideout
Drive-by Truckers Variety Show 11/25, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com
Dua Lipa presents Studio 2054 11/27, 8 PM, livestream at universe.com
Kurt Elling Sings Christmas 12/5, 5 and 8 PM; 12/6, 4 and 7 PM, City Winery
Emily Blue, Marielle Kraft 1/8/2021, 7 PM, Chop Shop
Every Shiny Thing: A Tribute to Joni Mitchell featuring Andrea Bunch 1/24/2021, 7 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
Fratellis 1/22/2021, 8 PM, Metro, 18+
Freedom From and Freedom To featuring Angel Bat Dawid, Johanna Brock, Olivia Harris, Ramah Malebranche, Janice Misurell-Mitchell, Luc Mosley, Ugochi Nwaogwugwu, Julian Otis, Cameron Pfiffner, Scott Rubin, Jefferey Thomas, Adam Zanolini, and more 12/5-12/6, 7 PM, livestream at twitch.tv/elasticartschicago FREE
Robbie Fulks 11/22, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com/hideout
Fuzz 2/4/2021, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Anthony Gomes 11/27, 7 PM, Brauer House, Lombard
Gorillaz present Song Machine Live 12/12, 6 PM, livestream at live-now.com
Gray Sound presents Damon Locks 12/8, 7:30 PM, livestream at graycenter.uchicago.edu FREE
Patty Griffin 11/21, 7 PM; 12/5, 7 PM, livestream at mandolin.com
Sarah Harmer 2/12/2021, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
Heat featuring DJ Ron Carroll and more Thursdays, 7 PM, through 12/23, Le Nocturne Chicago
Patterson Hood 11/18, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com/pattersondbt
Griffin House 12/3-12/4, 7:30 PM, City Winery
Keefe Jackson/Jim Baker/Julian Kirshner 11/28, 8 PM, Constellation, in-person concert with concurrent livestream at youtube.com/user/constellationchicago
Jayhawks perform *The Sound of Lies* 11/29, 8 PM, livestream at mandolin.com
Pokey LaFarge, Esther Rose 2/19/2021, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Dylan LeBlanc 11/18, 7 PM, livestream at citywinery.com
Leland Blue 11/18, 8 PM, livestream at audiotree.tv/staged-show/leland-blue
Ted Leo and friends 11/12, 8 PM; 11/19, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com/ted-leo
Local H 11/20, 8 PM, livestream at audiotree.tv/staged-show/local-h
Los Chicos del 512: The Selena Experience 1/29/2021, 8 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan
Magnetic Fields 1/17/2021-1/20/2021, 8 PM, City Winery, rescheduled
Stephen Malkmus, Qais Essar & the Magik Carpet 3/4/2021, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Dan Mangan 1/23/2021, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
Marsha's Music 20th Anniversary Virtual Fam Jam featuring Uncle Gerry 11/21, 3:30 PM, livestream at marshasmusic.com
Monster Magnet, Nebula, Silvertomb 1/30/21, 8 PM, Metro, 18+
Meshell Ndegeocello presents Chapter & Verse: The Gospel of James Baldwin 11/17; 12/15, monthly release, go to meshell.com/intro each month for interactive tool kits and visual media created by Ndegeocello and guest artists
Nielsen Trust 12/10, 8 PM, Brauer House, Lombard
Nois 11/20, 7 PM, performing works by Gemma Peacocke, Sam Pluta, Marcos Balter, Viet Cuong, Georg Friedrich Haas, and Pauline Oliveros, livestream at tickets.uchicago.edu
Gregory Porter, Ledisi 2/17/2021, 7 PM, Chicago Theatre
LeAnn Rimes 2/5/2021, 7 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan
Maggie Rose, Them Vibes 2/13/2021, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Sadistik 12/4, 9 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com/sadistik
Saturday Night Live livestream with DJ Alan King Saturdays, 8 PM, through 12/5, livestream at twitch.tv/djalanking FREE
Isaiah Sharkey 11/20, 7 PM, livestream at Columbia College's Contemporary Music YouTube channel, youtube.com/channel/UCZF37AbpcZudnEd9dQfLoiQ FREE
Silverstein 2/9/2021, 6 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+
Soundtrack series featuring Duane Powell 11/27, noon, livestream at mcachicago.org FREE
Spinning Home Movies screening series featuring Roy Kinsey 11/19, 7 PM, livestream at crowdcast.io/e/shmroykinsey FREE
Split Single 1/2/2021, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Sylvan Esso 11/17, 8 PM; 12/1, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com
Tokimonsta 2/13/2021, 7 PM, Metro, 18+
Verve Pipe 11/21, 5 and 8 PM, 11/22, 4 and 7 PM, concurrent livestream at citywinery.com for the 8 PM show on 11/21
Video Age 2/25/2021, 9:15 PM, Empty Bottle
Vio-lence, Dysphoria, Wraith, Gavel 3/13/2021, 7 PM, Reggies' Rock Club, 17+
Stephen Wade 4/3/2021, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
Rufus Wainwright 11/13, 4 PM; 11/20, 4 PM; 11/27, 4 PM, livestream at veeps.com
Wardruna 10/1/2021, 8:30 PM, Auditorium Theatre
Keith Washington 11/20, 7 PM, livestream at citywinery.com
Watkins Family Hour, Courtney Hartman 5/15/2021, 5 and 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
Watsky 4/23/2021, 7 PM, Metro
Ben Watt 2/18/2021, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Weathers, Moby Rich, Kenzo Cregan 2/28/2021, 7 PM, Schubas
The Weeknd, Sabrina Claudio, Don Toliver 6/21/2021, 7 PM, United Center
Susan Werner 10/22/2021, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
Widespread Panic 4/1/2021-4/3/2021, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre
Jontavious Willis 1/28/2021, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

THE CANNABIS PLATFORM
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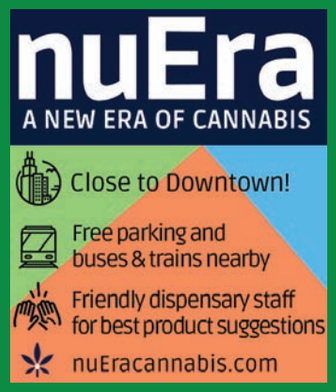

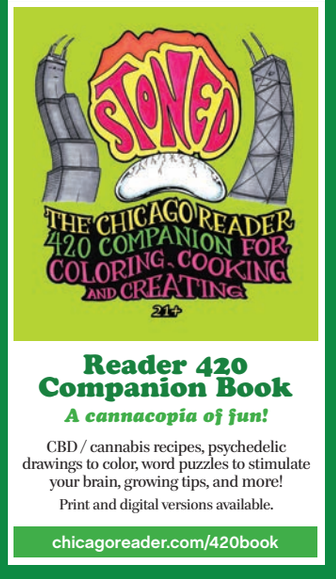

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SAVAGE LOVE

What's more taboo: voting for Trump or foursomes?

Maybe you have family in swing states, maybe you're just looking to swing

By Dan Savage

Q: Why are threesomes much more accepted in the popular imagination than foursomes? I was just googling "finding foursomes" and the first result is an article about threesomes that takes for granted that people are looking for MFF. That is a form of heteronormativity, right? I am not judging threesomes, of course, but asking why foursomes are perceived as more taboo. Would be interested in knowing more about what you think about this or if you have any resources to recommend as I am approaching this now with my partner for the first time. —Willing To Foursome

A: I don't think the popular imagination has conspired against foursomes or that foursomes are really that much more taboo than threesomes, WTF. Rather, I think threesomes are easier to arrange than foursomes and the popular imagination reflects that fact. Think about it: Finding two people who wanna fuck each other is hard. Finding three people who all wanna fuck each other—Person A wants to fuck Person B and Person C, Person B wants to fuck Person A and Person C, Person C wants to fuck Person A and Person B—is harder still. Adding a Person D to the mix makes the wannafuckmath infinitely more complicated. Which is not to say everybody fucks everybody during a threesome, of course, but at the very least everyone involved has to at least be OK with fucking in very close proximity to everyone else involved.

And while complicated to arrange and often emotionally tricky, WTF, threesomes aren't really *that* taboo. According to research into sexual fantasies done by Dr. Justin Lehmiller, it's the single most common sexual fantasy. More than 90 percent of men and nearly 90 percent of women fantasize about having a threesome, according to Dr. Lehmiller's research; according to other research, roughly one in five people have actually participated in at least one threesome. (Full disclosure/cumblebrag: I lost my virginity in a MMF threesome.)

Threesomes are heteronormative by design, e.g. they were arranged to fulfill a straight man's standard-issue MFF fantasy, but judging from my mail just as many MFF threesomes are arranged to fulfill the same-sex desires of often-but-not-always-newly-out bisexual women who already have husbands or boyfriends—less heteronormative and more bisupportive/biexplorative. (My mail isn't scientific evidence, I realize, but it's what I've got.) And for the record I don't think there's anything wrong with a heteronormative threesome.

Straight guys should be allowed to have and be allowed to realize their sexual fantasies without being shamed, just like everyone else, so long as they're realizing them with consenting adult partners. And while straight guys have historically done most of the judging and shaming of non-straight/non-guys over the entire course of human history, the corrective isn't to heap shame on straight guys with off-the-rack sexual fantasies. It's to demand that no one should be shamed for their sexual fantasies and we demonstrate our commitment to that principle by not shaming anyone—not even straight guys—who seek to realize their sexual fantasies with other consenting adults.

And finally, WTF, there is one place where foursomes are far less taboo and could even be described as standard: the organized and mostly straight and often supremely heteronormative swingers' scene. If you and your partner are of the opposite sex and are interested in or willing to settle for strictly heterosexual sex where men are concerned, you might find more luck arranging foursomes at swingers' parties—once those parties are possible again—than on dating apps.

Q: Where do I go from here? My parents voted for Trump in 2016 and again in 2020. I'm a lesbian. My partner and I have been together for nearly 20 years. My parents have always been supportive, we have a great relationship. But I can't reconcile their vote for this piece of trash. They're not even pro-life or religious. I genuinely don't understand. —What The Fuck Do I Do Now?

A: My dad voted for George W. Bush in 2004. Bush's campaign was pushing anti-gay marriage ballot initiatives across the country in the hopes that bigots would turn out in huge numbers and put his incompetent ass back in the White House. The fact that the then-president of the United States—the worst one we thought we'd see in our lifetimes—was waging a demagogic campaign against *one of his own children* didn't stop my dad from voting for him. For a second time.

I didn't stop talking to my father.

While I believe we have to confront family members about their bigotries and that there have to be social consequences when people vote for racism and fascism and oligarchy and corruption and disease and death, WTF-DIDN, I don't think cutting off contact with non-toxic/non-QAnon parents or family members is the answer. Where there's evidence of cognitive dissonance—and a family member voting for someone seeking to harm people they love is certainly evidence of cognitive dissonance—there's also an opportunity. So I would urge you to express your displeasure to your parents and demand better from them and to keep bringing it up. While text messages from strangers and robocalls often fail to move people, appeals to conscience—sometimes angry ones—from family members often work. I've heard from a lot of people over the last few months whose parents voted for Trump in 2016 but voted for Biden this year. I wish I could say my dad was one of them. Maybe next time.

There are elections coming up in 2022 and there's a high likelihood we will see a Trump on the ballot in 2024. (There are two special elections in Georgia in January that will determine who controls the U.S. Senate!) The parents who disappointed you and endangered our democracy in this election are likely to come around before the next election if you demand answers from them now.

Send letters to mail@savagelove.net. Download the *Savage Lovecast* at savagelovecast.com. @fakedansavage

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Creative Representative: Chicago IL. Sale, facilitate printing services to clients. Assist, advise on special events accessories: design, style, budget. Arrange, design, monitor execution of audio-visual printed decorations, invitations, displays, commercial graphics, logos. Customer service, prep contracts. Use graphic software. 1 yr exp. Must speak Polish. Res: Art Vision LLC, artvisionone@gmail.com

Medical Research Network seeks a Manager of Compliance in Evanston, IL to ensure all functions, programs and projects for the MRN are working in compliance with MRN's quality standards and written procedures. Req. BS + 1 yr exp or in lieu of BS 2 addt'l yrs of exp. Mail resume to: (MRN), Attn: Graham Wylie, 8001 N Lincoln Ave, Skokie, IL 60077. Must reference Job Title: Manager of Compliance; Code: 000001. EOE.

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Amko International, Inc seeks an International Marketing Specialist. Mail resume to 911 N Hilltop Dr, Itasca, IL.

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PERSONALS

First its Thanksgiving, then X-mas. Well have fun shopping at the mall, record stores, T-shirts, BANDS download music on the tube. So much fun GNR, Aerosmith, M. Crue, B. Sabbath, ACDC, Oh I love Pink, J Bieber, LaGa B., Spears, Bowie, Poison, Madonna,Madonna, Gwen, J Lo, Shakira - Towe & I.

Happy Happy Happy
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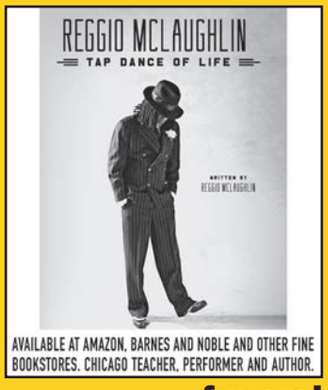

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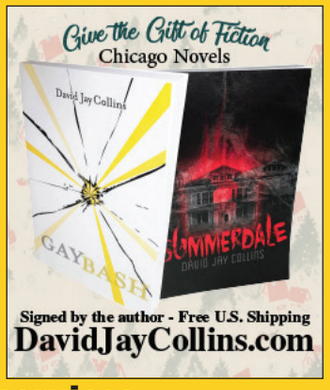

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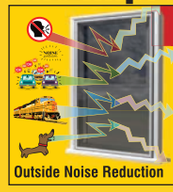
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